

LINCOLN'S AFFAIR OF HONOR / IS PLUTO REALLY A PLANET?

The Atlantic Monthly

FEBRUARY 1998

CAN'T ANYBODY HERE PLAY THIS GAME?

LURID TALES
OF CIA MISCONDUCT
HAVE OBSCURED
THE AGENCY'S
REAL PROBLEM—
IT DOESN'T
KNOW HOW
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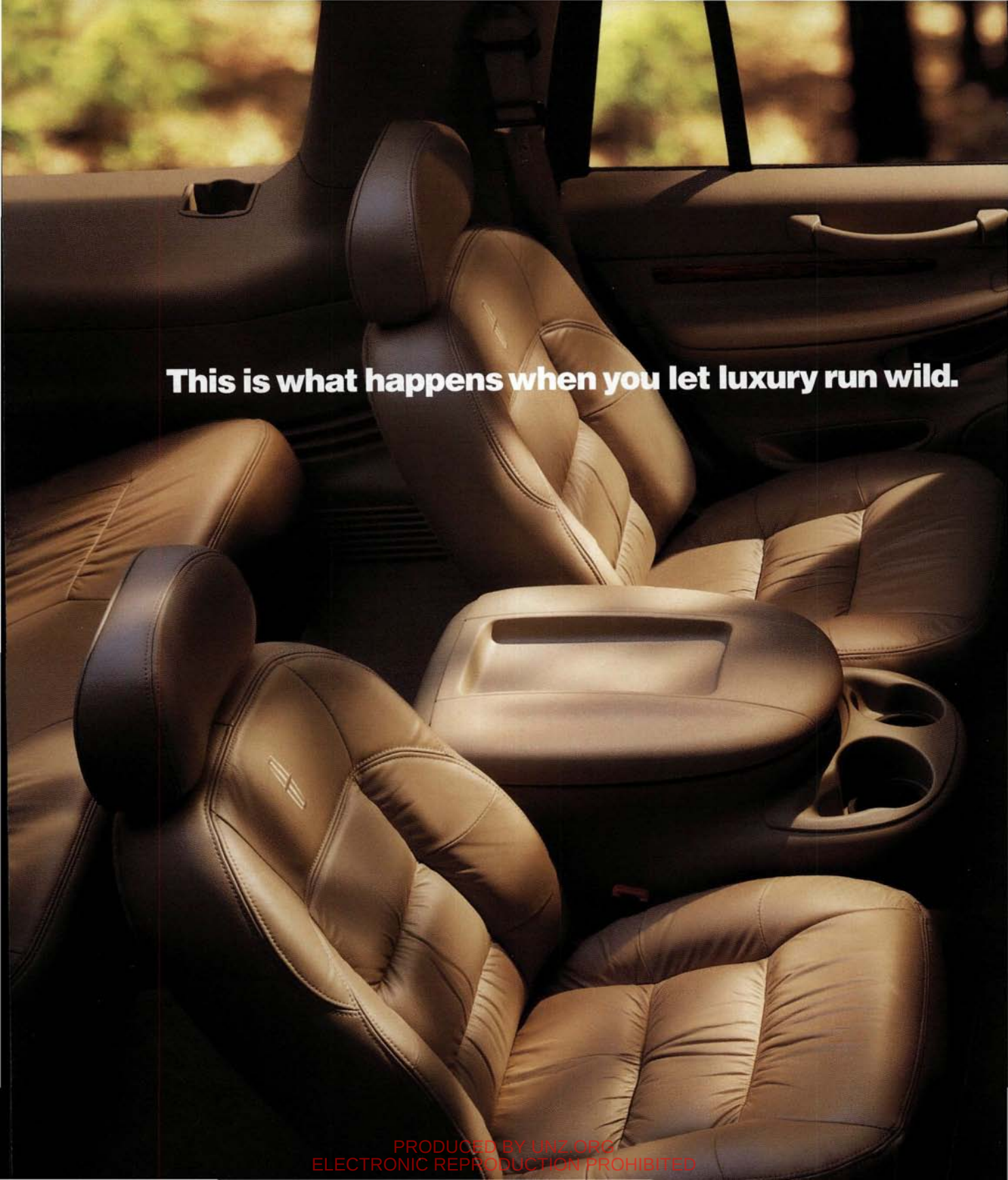
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by

EDWARD G. SHIRLEY

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A high-angle, close-up photograph of the front interior of a car. The focus is on the two leather-upholstered seats, which feature a quilted pattern and horizontal stitching. A light-colored leather center console with a rectangular storage slot is positioned between the seats. To the right, a portion of the passenger seat's side panel with two cupholders is visible. The car's interior is bathed in warm, golden light, likely from the sun filtering through trees outside, creating a sense of luxury and comfort. The text "This is what happens when you let luxury run wild." is superimposed in white over the upper part of the image.

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"Is she expecting you?" Danny picked up his list and perused it. "Miss Fairfax didn't tell me she was expecting any visitors."

"She's not expecting me. It's a surprise," said Will.

"Does she know you?"

"Oh, yes. We used to be married."

"Name?"

"William Slocum, but it will spoil the surprise."

"Okay, okay," said Danny, having sized him up: Good suit. Good shirt. Good shoes.

"Go on up. Dressing room #8 on the second floor. Here, don't forget your package."

Sophie Fairfax was sitting at her dressing table, applying cold cream over her theatrical makeup, when there was a knock at her door. "You can't come in yet, whoever it is," she called out. Then she added, "Who is it?"

"Me," said Will, opening the door.

"Oh, for God's sake, Will, what the hell are you doing here?" she asked. "How did you get by Danny at the stage door? He's supposed to keep people like you out."

"I told him we used to be married," said Will.

"You're the only 42-year-old man I know who still acts like an undergraduate prankster. I told you when I left you that the act was getting tired," said Sophie, rubbing her face with Kleenex. "Did you see the play?"

"Yes."

"No compliments?"

"You were wonderful."

"I'm not supposed to have to beg for that. That should have been your entrance line. What's that bedraggled package you're clasping to your bosom?"

"You may not believe this, Sophie, but I miss you," said Will.

"Enough, enough," replied Sophie.

"You may not believe this either, but when I left my apartment, this bottle of Absolut was beautifully wrapped in silver paper with dark blue ribbons, in honor of your birthday, but I was jostled in the subway, and it dropped on the floor and got kicked, which is why the paper's torn. There was a card, such a funny card, saying 'Forgive me' — perfect for the occasion — but it seems to have gotten lost, and then the shopping bag got wet and the bottom came out and it almost dropped again in the alley, and, anyway, Happy Birthday."

"I remember a time when your presents came in little velvet boxes," said Sophie, starting to apply her street makeup.

"When you moved out, you threw a velvet box at me, and I got a black eye," said Will.

"You did not get a black eye," replied Sophie.

"Almost." He placed the bottle on her dressing table. "This seemed more appropriate under the circumstances. I didn't want to be showy."

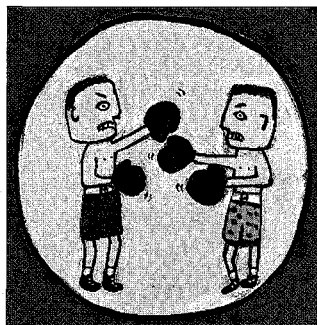
"I'm mad about the bottle," said Sophie. "Perfect for forsythia."

"How about a nip on a rainy night off Broadway?"

"Oh, why not? Are you planning on taking me out to supper?"

DUNNE.

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The sad truth about the CIA, the author, a former CIA case officer, writes, is that it has "for years been running an espionage charade in most countries, deceiving itself and others about the value of its recruited agents and intelligence production." (In a companion article Robert D. Kaplan considers whether the Army should take on covert action.)

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In September of 1842 Abraham Lincoln, then a rising young lawyer and politician, was challenged to a duel by a man he had ridiculed in print. Lincoln accepted.

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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

ON a crisp autumn day several years ago *Atlantic* senior editor Jack Beatty took one of his writers out to lunch: the business thinker and social philosopher Peter Drucker, then eighty-five, the author of the cover stories "The Age of Social Transformation" (November, 1994) and "Really Reinventing Government" (February, 1995). Beatty returned some three hours later, Drucker's conversation having loped among such subjects as the difficulties of conducting an orchestra for opera, the Japanese health-care system, and the outbreak of the First World War (Drucker was a boy in Vienna when he overheard his father talking about the terrible news just received from Sarajevo—the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand).

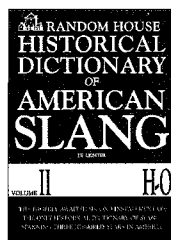
Soon after that lunch Beatty embarked on what has become *The World According to Peter Drucker* (The Free Press)—the first "interpretive introduction," as Beatty describes it, to the work of a man *The Economist* has called "the greatest thinker management theory has produced." The book, Beatty says, "tries to pass on to others the pleasure I took in reading Drucker." Actually, it goes one better, providing as well the pleasure of reading Beatty. Those familiar with his earlier book, *The*



Rascal King, a biography of the Boston political legend James Michael Curley, know what (besides lucidity) to expect: a deep appreciation of history and politics, a taste for portraiture and anecdote, and an acute allergy to dullness and cant.

When J. E. Lighter, the author of the "Word Improvisation" column that appears thrice yearly on the magazine's last page, brought out the first volume (A to G) of his *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, in 1994, the work was hailed by language scholars as the most significant lexicographical tilt at slang ever attempted.

Lighter has now published the second volume (H to O). A professor at the University of Tennessee, Lighter converses with a dry yet playful sense of humor, in a distinctive drawl that somehow blends NYU and Knoxville. His dictionary, too, is at once dry and playful, but also of immense value—and, in a country like the United States, beyond hope of true completion. "Slang is unrestrained and undignified," Lighter says, "but that's precisely why people use it. And the bigger and more diverse a society becomes, the more slang there's going to be." —THE EDITORS



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Lee K. Abbott ("All Things, All at Once") is the director of the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at Ohio State University. His most recent collection of stories, *Wet Places at Noon*, was published last year.

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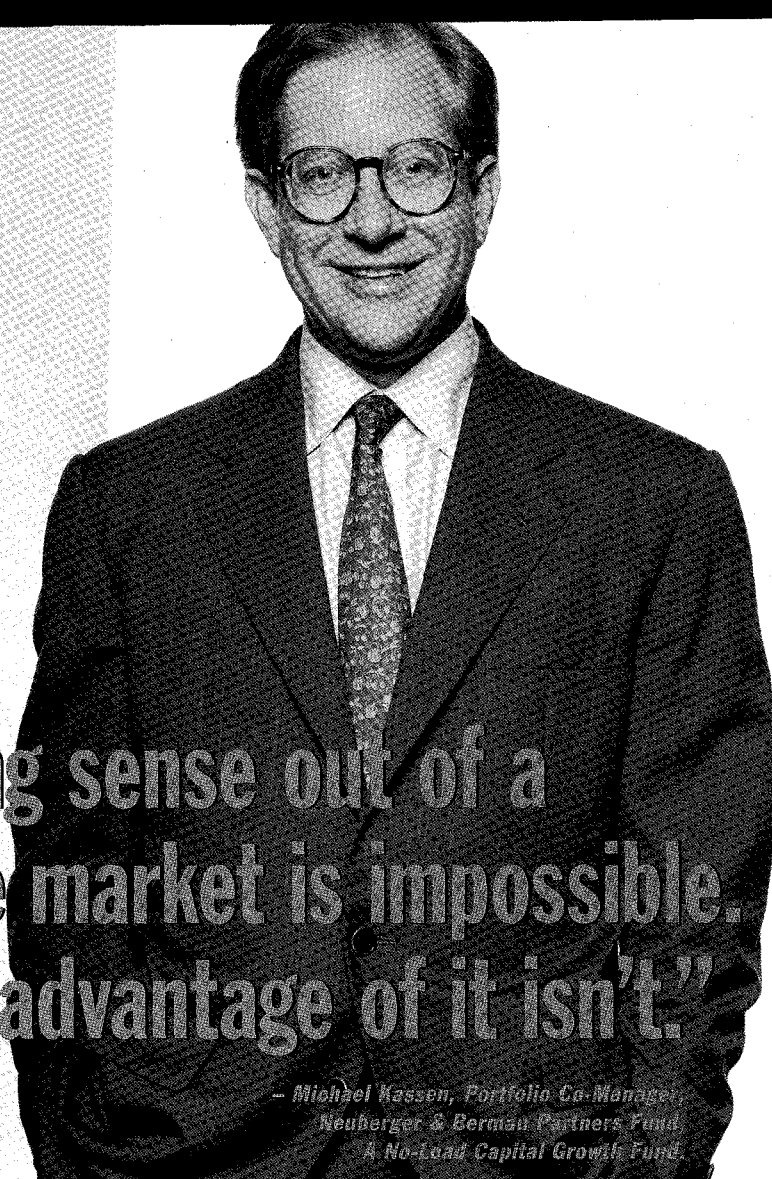
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LETTERS

Typewriter Man

In his article "Typewriter Man" (November *Atlantic*), Ian Frazier professed puzzlement over why early typewriter designers came up with the awkwardly arranged QWERTY keyboard, which persists. The information booklet that comes with the Mavis Beacon typing tutorial software (The Software Toolworks, Inc., 1987-1993) offers the following explanation:

The *Type-Writer*, invented in 1872 by Christopher Latham Sholes, had a lot of trouble with the keys jamming if they were hit too closely in succession. Unable to redesign the machine to work faster, Sholes in desperation took a step calculated to slow the typist instead. After much experimentation, he produced an arrangement of keys so inconvenient, annoying, and troublesome that it could slow down even the most expert typist. The result was the QWERTY keyboard (after the first six letters of the typewriter's third row) which, with a few minor changes, still confounds typists today.

Kathleen Thorne
Bainbridge Island, Wash.

"Today no one can say for sure why Glidden and Sholes arranged the keys that way," Ian Frazier says of the standard typewriter keyboard, but he might have given the explanation most generally accepted as logical: the aim was to provide the most convenient fingering while separating the hammers so that they could rise and fall without getting in one another's way.

Note that such common combinations as *s-a-w*, *w-a-s*, *w-e-r-e*, and *t-h* are conveniently clumped, and *i-t* and *o-u-t* are handy. On my Remington Rand, the same model I used in the Second World War, the hammers for *w* and *s* adjoin, but the *a* hammer is third to their left, so that it can drop away from the other two.

It is often noted that the typist's left hand has more work than the right. This

may be related to right-brain control but is more likely related to the right-hand job of returning the carriage and moving the roller without the later convenience of the space lever.

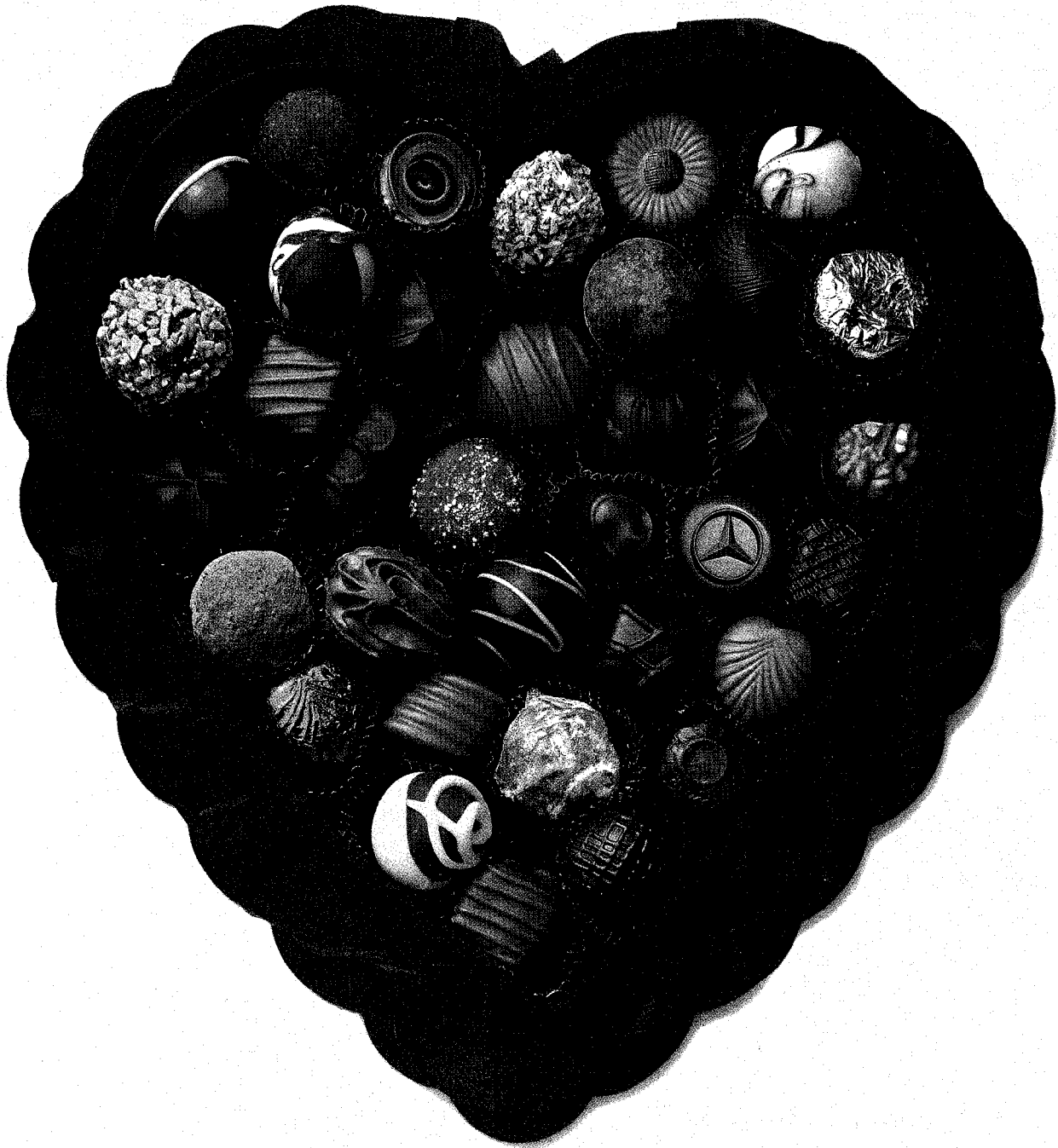
Leon Lukaszewski
Walnut Creek, Calif.

I've read somewhere that the QWERTY arrangement is quite deliberate. The explanation has such a true capitalistic ring to it that I've always thought it to be accurate. Supposedly an early manufacturer of typewriters (possibly Glidden and Sholes) quickly found his machines in great demand. All resources were devoted to maximum production and none to R&D. The machines were originally produced with a keyboard that lent itself quite naturally to finger dexterity of the human hand. Women using these ancient machines rapidly acquired such proficiency that the machines were not capable of keeping up with the typing speeds. Rather than do a major engineering overhaul of the machine, which was making the manufacturer wealthy, a quick and deliberate fix was instituted. The manufacturer determined which letters were most common in English and ranked them all by frequency of appearance in the language. He then assigned the most frequent letters to the least dexterous fingers; hence typists were (at least temporarily) slowed down by this ergonomically inefficient arrangement. Sales of the machine continued until a better, competing design appeared on the market. The QWERTY keyboard is the odd and lingering result of this capitalistic subterfuge.

Wilson M. Hancock
Tumwater, Wash.

Ian Frazier replies:

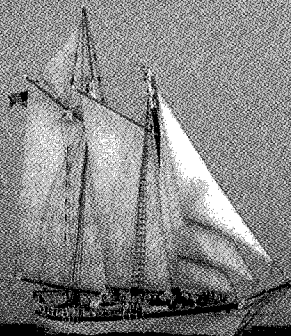
Explanations for the arrangement of the QWERTY keyboard remain at the level of myth and speculation. Michael Adler, a leading historian of the manual typewriter, dismisses as "quite simply



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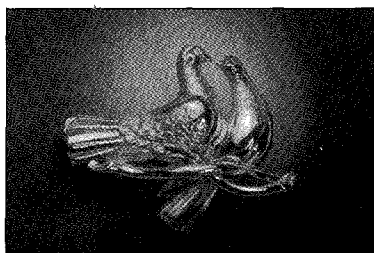


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nonsense" the theory that the letters were arranged in order of frequency to prevent type-bar clash: "If it had indeed been Sholes' intention to place the most frequently used letters as far apart as possible," Adler has written, "he should have positioned E and T diametrically opposite each other, not virtually adjacent to each other, with E and R as far apart as possible as well." As for the theory that the keyboard was deliberately made inconvenient to slow typists down, Adler points out that slow, two-finger typing was the standard method for at least a decade after the typewriter and its QWERTY keyboard came along. The mind craves explanation, and the notion that the QWERTY keyboard was a clever subterfuge has obvious appeal. But Sholes and Glidden left no evidence of what they had in mind with QWERTY, and we may never know for sure.

Are Schools Failing?

Peter Schrag's "The Near-Myth of Our Failing Schools" (October *Atlantic*) paints too rosy a picture. Like Admiral Hyman Rickover, who is cited in the article, Schrag depends exclusively on standardized tests and other "outsiders'" evidence. Whereas Rickover used such information to get too gloomy about American schools, Schrag's reliance on it blinds him to depressing classroom realities.

(1) The "whatever" attitude. As in "No, Julius Caesar couldn't have been mad at Shakespeare's portrayal of him; he died more than 1,500 years before Shakespeare wrote the play." "Whatever." The student posture is languorous and aloof, connoting "We both know I have to be here; I'll do what you tell me to, but don't make me think about anything or pretend I care."

(2) The horror of "acting white." As in "Participating in class or doing homework or studying for tests brands me as a traitor to my peer group and my culture. The system is set up to make white kids look smarter than we are. I'm no sucker; I'm not playing your game."

(3) The distraction of "theory": Many of the brightest minds coming out of our graduate schools and teachers' colleges have been infected with continental rot: denying truth, denying objective reality,

rebuking education as a domination, and writing what Camille Paglia has well termed "pretentious, labyrinthine junk."

The test scores tell us something; the experience of facing students and interacting with colleagues tells us something else. Let's put the data together before articulating premature conclusions.

Jeff Zorn

San Francisco, Calif.

Peter Schrag asserts that the well-known decline in SAT scores "occurred chiefly because a larger percentage of lower-ranking students (those from the bottom half of their school classes) began taking the test." His finding is contradicted by a November, 1991, *Atlantic* article by Daniel Singal, "The Other Crisis in American Education." Singal found a very substantial decline in the number of students earning high SAT scores—thus the average scores declined not so much because more low scores were included but because there were fewer high scores. Thomas Sowell's *Inside American Education* (1993) reported the same: "In reality, however, SAT scores declined at the top, not because there were more low scores averaged in. More than 116,000 students scored above 600 on the verbal SAT in 1972 and fewer than 71,000 scored that high ten years later." Singal and Sowell are supported by the 1986 edition of the Center for Education Statistics' *The Condition of Education*.

Schrag appears to have drawn most of his information from a report written by staff members at the Sandia National Laboratories in 1991. The report was originally commissioned by Energy Secretary James Watson but was later "suppressed" by the Department of Energy and the Bush Administration.

Despite the otherwise sound reputation of the Sandia National Laboratories, subsequent analysis of the Sandia report indicates that it was in error with respect to the SAT decline. A respected scholar—Professor Lawrence Stedman—concluded that the decline noted by the Sandia staff resulted not just from the presence of more low scores earned by low-ranked students but from declines in the scores earned by students at all levels. Moreover, Stedman reported in a peer-reviewed educational-research journal that the Sandia report was "seriously flawed by errors in analysis, insufficient evi-

dence, mischaracterizations of the international data, and a failure to consider the evidence that U.S. students are performing at low levels.”

J. E. Stone

*Education Consumers ClearingHouse
Johnson City, Tenn.*

Peter Schrag replies:

Jeff Zorn's points, while generally correct, could as easily have been made two generations ago, when any student in my eighth-grade class at P.S. 89 who worked too hard or raised his hand too often—this in an all-white class—was quickly labeled a “fruit” or an “A.K.” (for ass-kisser) by his classmates. Student postures in many schools were languorous and aloof and sometimes contemptuous, though since no statistics are kept on such things, we can't know whether things have gotten worse or better. And although I agree that many teachers (particularly in higher education) have recently been infected by “continental rot,” the proud know-nothing ignorance (about math or foreign affairs or history) of many of their predecessors of the golden age—not to

mention the frequent invocation of ethnic stereotypes, if not outright prejudice—hardly commends them as models.

As for the SAT, the last time I checked, average scores on the math test were higher than they have been at any time in the past generation; and although the number of scores over 600 on the verbal part was lower in 1982 than it had been a decade earlier—as was the total number of test takers—average total (math plus verbal) SAT scores for each fifth of the high school graduating class have crept up steadily since the mid-1970s, which is when such breakdowns were first reported. As to “mischaracterizations” of data, international and otherwise, there are plenty on all sides of this issue, and hardly space in this whole magazine for a full discussion.

Reading Wars

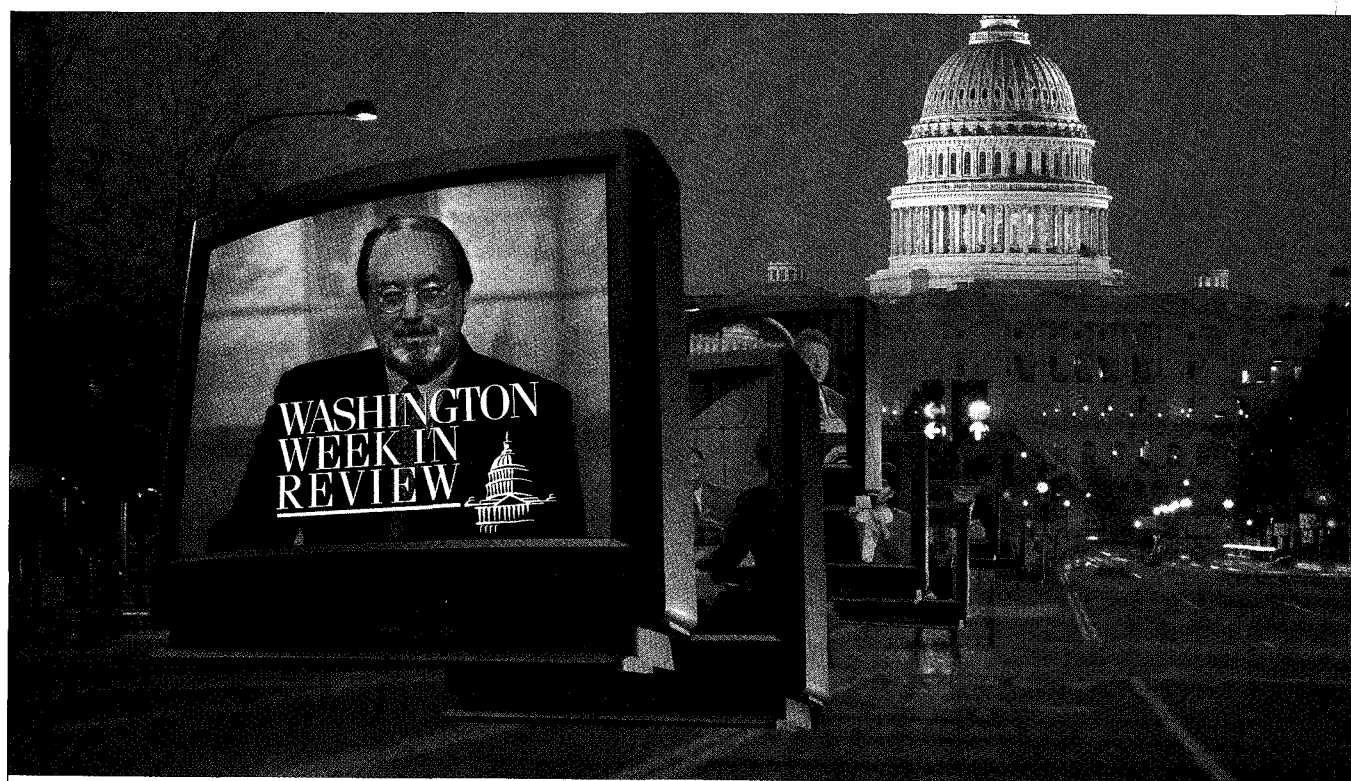
Nicholas Lemann's “The Reading Wars” (November *Atlantic*) assumes that phonics gives us a reliable way to teach reading—and writing. Unfortunately, it

does not. If it did, whole-language would never have gained a foothold.

If English phonics were as regular and logical as that of other alphabetically written languages, anything as rash as whole-language would have been laughed out of court. Imagine trying to persuade a Spanish, Italian, or German teacher, or a teacher of any other language, to teach reading by means of whole-language!

English phonics gives us trouble because its forty-four phonemes are spelled in more than 400 different ways. Even though the seventy most common spellings of our forty-four spoken sounds will spell about 85 percent of our words correctly, we are still obliged to remember which spelling of a particular sound goes with which word. Consider the very common *ee* and *ea* spellings of the long-*e* sound. You must *remember* that “seed” is spelled *s-e-e-d*, but that “seat” is not spelled *s-e-e-t*. One whose faulty memory spells “sweet” *s-w-e-a-t* (like “seat”) has written a word that rhymes with “wet.”

English phonics per se—unaccompanied by exhaustive memory of its irregu-



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larities—is a complete hodgepodge. For the one in five who has difficulty remembering our countless spelling inconsistencies, today's computers can be made to hammer the baffling irregularities into memory.

Extensive research confirms that immediate correction of an error sends much stronger signals to memory than a delayed correction. Computers can now overcome what has always been the vulnerable part of phonics teaching—the flaw that opened the door to whole-language.

Edward Rondthaler
President
American Literacy Council
New York, N.Y.

The Zero Controversy

The criterion for choosing a numbering scheme for years is convenience, not that “zero is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the other integers” (Dick Teresi’s reply, Letters, November *Atlantic*). For me, the single biggest inconvenience with the current scheme is in converting between a century number and the corresponding years. So as an experiment I have invented the “hectury” (from the Greek “hect-” for 100), which is an interval of 100 years that simplifies the conversion. For example, the nineteenth hectury comprises the years 1900 through 1999. Here is a conversion table:

Hectury	Years
20	2000–2099
19	1900–1999
18	1800–1899
...	
10	1000–1099
9	900–999
...	
1	100–199
0	0–99
1 B.C.	100–1 B.C.
2 B.C.	200–101 B.C.

As this table shows, fixing one problem causes others. Now there is a year zero. Just as bad, there is a zeroth hectury. Worse yet, the simplified conversion rule for hecturies doesn’t work for years B.C.

Computer programmers are among those who count from zero. In the C pro-

gramming language, arrays are numbered from zero. Thus the elements of an array having three elements are numbered 0, 1, 2. Forgetting this convention is a frequent cause of errors known as “off-by-one errors.” These errors are especially common among programmers who switch from using the Pascal programming language to using C, because Pascal array elements are usually numbered beginning with one instead of with zero.

The number lines accompanying Teresi’s reply would be even more useful if they showed the negative numbers to the left of zero. They would then show that the Bede-Dionysus numbering scheme is less consistent in assigning a number to a one-year interval than the Cassini scheme. The Cassini scheme always assigns the integer that is at the right endpoint of a one-year interval, where the Bede-Dionysus scheme does so only for intervals to the right of zero. For intervals to the left of zero the Bede-Dionysus scheme switches to using the left endpoint of each interval. By the way, mathematicians commonly use the word “interval,” whereas Teresi uses “increment,” for a set of points between a pair of endpoints.

Steve Tyler
Portland, Oreg.

Illegal Whaling

Mark Derr’s article on whaling contains the statement that “abundant evidence exists that illegal whaling is a major problem” (“To Whale or Not to Whale,” October *Atlantic*). This raises some questions: What are Derr’s criteria for illegality, to whom are they applied, and what is the evidence?

I am unaware of any current evidence of “illegal whaling,” although of course there has been much of it in the past, including the recently admitted-to illegal catches by the former Soviet Union. Only thirty-nine states are members of the IWC, and so far as I’m aware, none are violating the ICRW by catching whales contrary to their obligations under that treaty. The current catches by Norway and Japan are allowed under different provisions of the treaty. Other catches under the convention are by aboriginal whalers and also specifically allowed under the schedule. Any nonmember

state can take whales lawfully unless it has violated restrictions under another agreement. Most of these nonmembers accept the 1982 Law of the Sea treaty under which taking whales is perfectly lawful. Very few nonmembers of the IWC target and take whales.

William T. Burke
Seattle, Wash.

Mark Derr replies:

William T. Burke, an expert on the law of the sea, has argued that the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, established by the International Whaling Commission to protect whales from any hunting in that region, is illegal. Japan is the only IWC member to have voted against the establishment of the sanctuary and to subscribe to Mr. Burke’s opinion. Monitoring of whaling activities is weak to nonexistent, but what evidence does exist raises alarm in many quarters. For example, in recent years Japanese customs inspectors have seized whale meat in excess of 700 tons (representing forty to eighty-five whales) from Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan. Norwegian customs inspectors have also seized whale meat, mislabeled for illegal export. Whether any of this meat was taken “legally” is doubtful, but in any event the trade violates the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which restricts trade in all large whale species. Although the “current catches” of Norway and Japan may be “allowed,” export of that meat is not, raising ethical and legal questions about the purpose of the hunts. Without enough international inspectors and safeguards, judging the precise extent of the problem remains difficult, but whether the whaling is sanctioned by governments or conducted by individuals, it appears significant to many observers.

Editors’ Note

The Atlantic Monthly’s digital edition, *Atlantic Unbound*, can be seen on the Web at www.TheAtlantic.com. There readers will find regular online columns by *Atlantic* editors and writers, interactive roundtable discussions, dispatches from overseas correspondents, interviews with authors, book excerpts and readings, articles from *The Atlantic’s* archive, and more. In Post & Riposte, an online forum, visitors can discuss *Atlantic* articles and other topics with readers worldwide.

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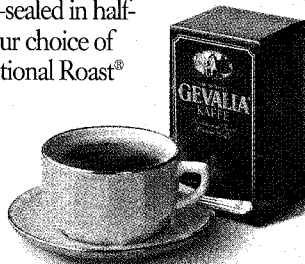
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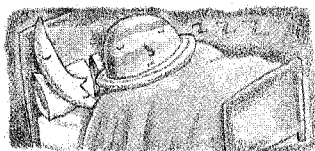
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THE FEBRUARY ALMANAC

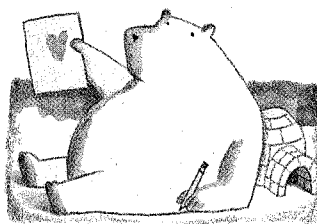
Health & Safety

By this month, according to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, the Department of Health and Human Services must set practices for medical providers and insurers to follow in order to protect the confidentiality of personal health information that is maintained on electronic systems. Specifically, health providers and insurers must, over the next two years, assign identifiers to all those who access patient records, and establish "audit trails" that monitor all access to clinical information. They must also encrypt all patient-identifiable information that is transmitted over the Internet and other public networks. The act further requires that Congress enact a national patient-confidentiality law by August of 1999. A 1995 survey of Fortune 500 companies found that a third consult individual health records when making job-related decisions, sometimes without informing employees.



The Skies

February 1: The waxing crescent Moon lies close to Saturn, high in the southwest just after sundown; Jupiter and Mars are low on the western horizon. **11:** Full Moon, also known this month as the Snow or Trapper's Moon. **23:** Venus, just past peak brilliance for the year, hangs near the waning crescent Moon in the predawn sky. **26:** A solar eclipse peaks at about 12:30 P.M. EST. The eclipse will be total only in a narrow path across Panama, Colombia, and the southeastern Caribbean; for most North American observers it will be manifested as a small chip out of the Sun.

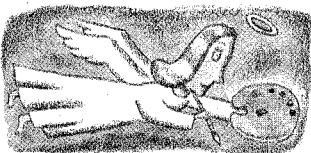


Q&A

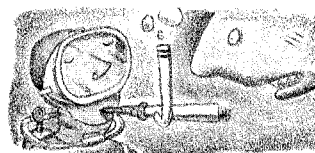
Are animals "handed," preferring one paw or claw to another? Many are. Unlike human beings, though, the members of other animal species tend to be evenly divided in terms of which side they favor. There appear to be exceptions: most polar bears, for example, are thought to favor the left paw. (Wildlife experts offer this advice, for what it is worth: if chased by a polar bear, move to the left, so that the bear will not be attacking with its dominant paw.) Scientists have long believed handedness to be an adaptation among animals that use their hands, paws, or claws regularly for activities such as catching and eating food. However, researchers have recently discovered evidence of forepaw preference in toads, which do not typically use their forepaws to manipulate objects—a finding suggesting that the phenomenon may have a longer evolutionary history than previously suspected.

Arts & Letters

Two exhibits drawn from the Vatican Museums open in the United States this month. On **February 4** "The Invisible Made Visible: Angels From the Vatican," a collection of more than 100 paintings, sculptures, and artifacts depicting angels, opens at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, in Los Angeles. The works range from a ninth-century B.C. Assyrian stone relief to paintings by modern artists such as Georges Rouault and Salvador Dalí. Nearly



half of them have never before been shown outside the Vatican. On **February 8** "Vatican Treasures: Early Christian, Renaissance, and Baroque Art From the Papal Collections" opens at the Cleveland Museum of Art. It contains some 40 paintings, sculptures, illuminated manuscripts, and other works, including one of the Vatican's most important altar paintings: Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ*. Also this month Sotheby's will auction more than 40,000 items that once belonged to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, including the mahogany table at which, in 1936, the Duke, then King Edward VIII of England, signed his abdication. The collection has been owned by Mohamed al-Fayed since the Duchess's death, in 1986.

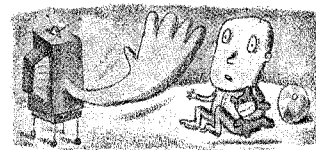


Expiring Patent

No. 4,250,900. Cigarette Filter Holder With Optional Snorkel Bypass Accessory. "A cigarette holder . . . adapted to receive a filtered cigarette end, [with] a flexible snorkel tube having a pointed end for insertion in a side of said cigarette forwardly of said holder, . . . providing means for inhaling smoke forward of said holder bypassing said cigarette filtered end, whereby said article can be used for inhaling unfiltered smoke from said snorkel and filtered smoke from said cigarette."

Government

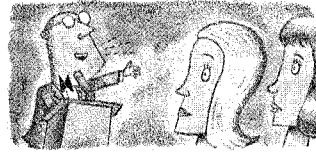
This month is the first in which manufacturers can by law sell television sets equipped with V-chips—devices that let parents block the reception of programs that include adult language, sex, or violence. The sweeping Telecommunications Act of February, 1996, mandated that parents be



provided with timely information about the nature of upcoming programming and be given a means of blocking shows they don't want their children to see. In order to give broadcasters adequate time to institute a ratings system, among other reasons, the act also required that manufacturers wait at least two years before starting to sell TVs with V-chips. Because of delays in working out the ratings system and the technology itself, however, it is unlikely that new TVs will contain V-chips for several months. Eventually—the date has not yet been set—all new TVs 13 inches or larger will have to contain V-chips.

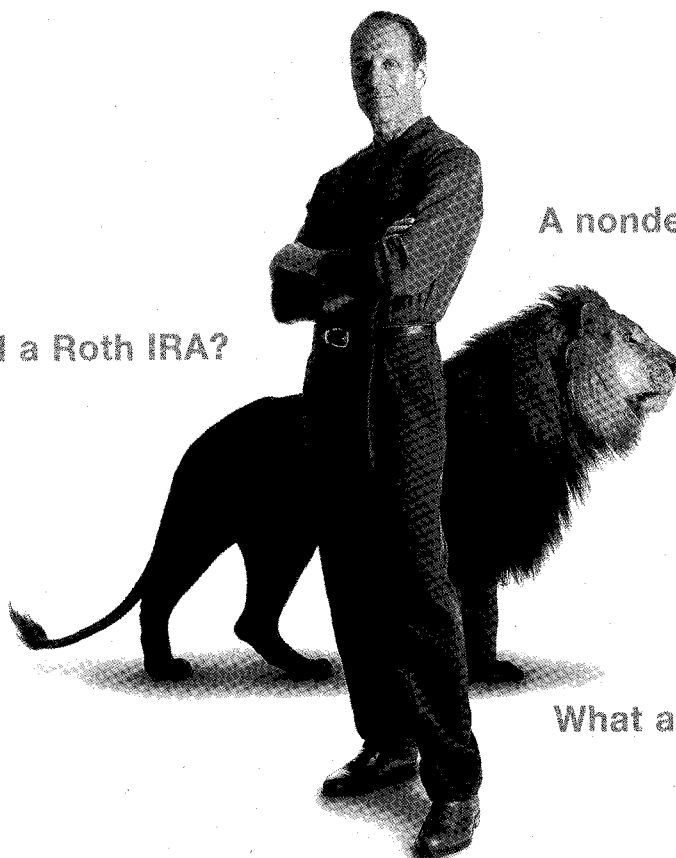
75 Years Ago

Robert M. Gay, writing in the February, 1923, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "There is . . . deep-seated in every manly breast a determination not to be, or at least not to appear to be, interested in anything that any teacher, lecturer, or preacher may say; and it is merely masculine to register this obscure impulse in any way short of audible groans. A woman will tell you that men are poor listeners because they want to do all the talking themselves; but such an unjust suspicion must be ascribed to the satirical view that one sex naturally holds of the other. However this may be, it is certainly true that women are courageous church-goers, concert-goers, lecture-goers, without whose encouragement most of the public talkers of the world would have to go out of business."



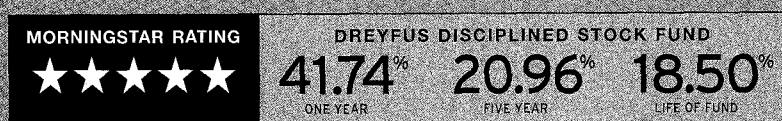
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The Thread of Time

*Imagination often fails us when we try to understand
a long-abandoned world*

THE controversy surrounding Madeleine Albright's unawareness of her family history, which broke out last year when President Bill Clinton named Albright Secretary of State, touched me intensely. We come from the same country, Czechoslovakia, and we experienced devastations wrought by two successive totalitarian systems. Our experiences were different in some significant respects: Albright is about a decade younger than I am, and she spent most of her childhood and adolescence abroad with her family. She probably has little memory of pre-war Czechoslovakia. I spent my first ten years in the bilingual, multicultural setting of southern Moravia; the memory of that time sits like a glowing jewel at the core of my being. Negatives I might remember about that time or might have diligently reconstructed during conventional psychotherapy lose their definition in the surge of intense love and longing that any mention of those years produces in me.

That first segment of my childhood ended in an unforeseen, surreptitious way: A customary summer vacation with my mother's family in Switzerland in the summer of 1938 was marred by the rising threat of war between Germany and Czechoslovakia. My father wrote a letter to my mother telling her to "come back but don't bring the children." Gratitude for shelter left no



by Kitty La Perriere

room to mourn the absence of good-byes. I spent the second decade of my life as a refugee in Switzerland, living with my grandmother, my uncle, and my aunt, who had been summoned from her job as a teacher in a girls' boarding school to look after her older sister's children. My brother, nine years my senior and about to start his university studies, became my parent, albeit a neglectful one. His left-wing politics and philosophically sophisticated atheism formed a counterweight to the old-fashioned Orthodox Jewish household that was our wartime home. The wider Swiss culture was not welcoming, to say the least. We were temporarily tolerated. At one point the Swiss foreign police demanded that I get a German passport, since Czechoslovakia was no longer a country and its passport was therefore invalid. The notion seemed preposterous: Germany was persecuting Jews, not issuing passports to them. My uncle accompanied me to the consulate, a forbidding building with a swastika on its door. I was afraid that I would somehow be spirited away from that building and not come out alive. I received a passport made out to Kitty Sarah Fischer, "Sarah" being the name attached to all female German Jewish subjects. This document was accepted by the Swiss while they considered deporting me to my home, or at least pushing me across the border. A few weeks later, luckily, that

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passport was revoked, easing my fears.

During those years I made close friends among my Swiss classmates, with whom I am in touch to this day. They remember that time differently. One of them wrote to me recently, when the role of Swiss banks during and after the Second World War hit the papers, "Was it like that for you? I guess I was too young then to put myself in another person's shoes." I remember being uninvited for an after-school visit by a classmate whose mother told her not to bring a Jew home. In school Dr. Matzig, our philosophy teacher, often wondered out loud how long I would be allowed to stay in Switzerland: "Here you sit safely in class while our German brethren are being slaughtered by the Asiatic hordes." Sometime in 1943 my

ing without interruption his membership in the Czech intelligentsia.

I have no personal acquaintance with Albright; I count an easy two degrees of separation, a friend of hers being married to the son of an old friend of mine. I have no information of any kind about her family or her inner life beyond what was published in the papers. However, reactions to her supposed ignorance of her Jewish roots, many of them hostile and disbelieving, highlighted for me what happens when one pulls the thread of time out of earlier events and ignores the fact that what was true then differs from what is true now. No matter how much lip service we pay to the relevance of sociopolitical and other systemic concepts, our imagination fails us when it comes to applying historical context to specifics.

■ ■ ■

The effective existence of Czechoslovakia—between the two world wars—lasted from 1918, when it was founded, to 1938, when it was dismembered, never truly to be whole and autonomous again. It was a new nation-state, liberated from imprisonment within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It excelled in industrial competence (at one point it was the eleventh most industrialized state in the world), in social consciousness, and in the patriotism of its citizens. Among the most intensely patriotic were its Jewish citizens.

Until the French Revolution the Jews in Europe had been defined as a roving, outcast population with no rights of citizenship. Heavily restricted in their rights to engage in most occupations, to own land or buildings, or to maintain permanent domiciles, they were tolerated by their host countries in good times, and persecuted, expelled, or killed in bad. Against this history the full citizenship granted to Jews in Czechoslovakia was a deliverance that made them ardent supporters of the state. A saying went, "The only Czechoslovaks are Jews; the others are either Czechs or Slovaks." I was a passionate Czechoslovak nationalist. For me and my acquaintances, Judaism, like Catholicism and Protestantism, was in those days primarily a religion rather than an ethnic-group designation.

In addition to an ardent love of the homeland there prevailed among many Jews of Czechoslovakia an optimistic attitude that tended toward rationalism,

secularism, and internationalism. Clear thinking, science, technology, and a sense of justice could solve human problems. Religion was not a prominent concern, especially among the intelligentsia. Many people in those days were atheists, or at least agnostics. Or perhaps they subscribed to the kind of pantheism espoused by Spinoza, another apostate Jew. But for the persecution of Jews, my identification as a Jew would have slipped very far down on my list of significant self-descriptions. During the war, however, when the National Socialist ideology redefined Jews as a race to be exterminated, it became impossible not to take a position about defining oneself as a Jew. Internal definition became necessary as external definition was imposed. My parents applied for an immigration visa to Brazil in 1942, when they were in Vichy France. As a matter of course, the consulate enclosed a baptismal certificate to be submitted as proof of conversion to Christianity, along with the other papers. Authorities in countries other than Germany often honored conversion; a Jew could become a Christian. That was not possible in Germany. I don't know whether my parents would have exercised that choice had they been forced to apply for admission to Brazil. Life went otherwise, and my father found himself first in a camp and then in Switzerland.

The Second World War intensified Jewish identity in some, while others fled or shed it out of fear. The liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, and the promise of a return to Eden, albeit a heavily damaged Eden, gave rise to tremendous exultation. I, for one, couldn't wait to get back. By 1946 I had obtained a new Czech passport and a Certificate of National Reliability. As soon as it was possible to travel, in the summer of 1947, we set out across a war-bombed Germany on a train bound for Prague—three first-class tickets for two packs of American cigarettes. I wanted to stay in Prague, but I was advised, perhaps warned, against it, and returned to Switzerland a few months later. Safe as my Swiss haven had been, living there was anything but validating and comforting. Swiss behavior during that time as it has recently been exposed is nothing new to me. I was told frequently how lucky I was to be temporarily tolerated there, and that I should not overstep my bounds. I

*In the Europe
of my youth
your name was
for life; your
domicile was
registered with
the police.*

mother was able to join us, and was eventually followed by my father. In 1939 my mother had managed to obtain an exit visa from the German Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia and an entry visa to France. She was allowed to visit us for one week each year, because she had been a Swiss citizen before her marriage to my father. This ruling did not apply to my father, who owed his miraculous rescue from a deportation train headed for an extermination camp in Poland to the persistence of my mother, the help of influential Swiss friends, and incredible luck.

Madeleine Albright, in contrast, left Czechoslovakia as a young child, together with her parents. They apparently settled in London, where her father was a member of the Czech government in exile—thus, one might reason, maintain-



Some children go to seek out their heroes.
 The glory of their nations.
 Traditions that stretch back two thousand years.

Others get to go because it's part of
 tonight's homework assignment.

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There's a new Web site that draws on the drama of the Olympic Games. Only this one uses the Nagano Games to teach kids about math, science and history. The Web site, The U.S. Olympic PBS Cyber School Powered by IBM, features interactive educational challenges and activities specially designed by teachers and students. It's a window into how the Internet can be used effectively

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withdrew inward, maintaining a world of meaning and realities that did not correspond to the meaning and realities around me. I was overjoyed at the thought of returning to my home, where, I imagined, I would resume being a Czechoslovak patriot.

The Communist takeover, in February of 1948, at first did not frighten me. The new Czech consulate in Switzerland called me in and ordered me to assume secretarial duties for them. They said I was needed; I knew the required languages and had been found politically acceptable. I was willing, even honored, to do the work. But I was in the middle of my term at school and wanted to finish it. When told that I had to report for work at the consulate within the week and that

I saw fit. The dean of students, Alverna Burdick, made sure that I had work so that I could earn spending money, and that I had a place to go during vacations.

When we move from context to context in discontinuous ways, and when no one is there to share our perceptions, our memory does strange things; we invalidate what we know. We forget. We reinterpret. In Switzerland one of my favorite foods had been poached trout. The restaurant would have a fish tank from which you could select the trout you wanted; twenty minutes later it would appear at your table, curled up, a lovely smoky-blue hue. Yes, *Forelle blau*—literally, “blue trout.” It would be served with lemon, parsley, peeled boiled potatoes, and brown butter. The trout had particular meaning for me, because on our graduation trip I had sat next to my French professor and offered to filet his trout for him. In our Orthodox household we ate fish often, and I was skilled at the task. Indeed, I did it elegantly, and Dr. Staub said playfully, “Well, that will guarantee you an A in the French finals.” One might think that poached trout had a well-grounded reality in my inner representations.

Occasionally, when at college we talked about food, I would venture a description of my favorite dish. Bemused, friendly, condescending reactions would ensue: “Trout? Trout is pan-fried. No one poaches trout.” I don’t know why this trout was so important to me. Perhaps it recalled me to a time when I had been better off—important to remember at this college where most students wore cashmere sets, pearls, and fur coats on the weekends, whereas I was a penniless alien. In any event, I soon stopped talking about, and then thinking about, poached trout. The memory had the quality of a fantasy, a hazy daydream I might once have had.

Six years after I left Switzerland, I made my first return visit. I walked into a restaurant, and there, to the left of the door, was a fish tank holding trout. I wept, and could not explain what it meant to reclaim an extruded part of my memory, my sanity, my sense of self.

Coming to America in the years after the Second World War meant leaving the old world behind and starting from scratch, as a new person. There was no sense that an integration of events on the

two sides of the Atlantic had to occur. Often the good-byes had been final. There were no expectations that one would see either the people or the conditions of one’s pre-American life ever again. The task at hand was survival and building up a life to sustain oneself. The horrors and pain of the abandoned world were simply pushed out of one’s ken. I met people in the early fifties who within a couple of years of arriving in America spoke their native language brokenly—and soon not at all. Today we recognize that in abandoning a language we abandon a whole way of knowing, a way of being, a part of who we once were.

In America you could change your name, choose your religion, move and live where you wanted. In the Europe of my youth your name was for life, your domicile was registered with the police, your community collected the tax for your religious affiliation, your profession was regulated by endless requirements and licenses. To escape who you were in Europe, you practically had to engage in fraud. Here you could just do it. What a different world we escapees from Europe found here. If one was a Jew by external classification only, and if that classification was primarily racist as propagated by the Nazis, then why adhere to it in this new country of new opportunities? I know nothing of Albright’s parents’ relationship to their Jewish identity. They, and their own parents, may have moved away from religious observance. And ethnic identity? In a world of virulent racism that expanded historical anti-Semitism into the doctrine of the superior Aryan race, ethnic or racial self-identification was not highly regarded. It was like yielding to the ideology of the exterminator. What remains of one’s Jewishness if one is not religious and neither feels nor seeks ethnic belongingness? It is difficult to see this nowadays, when ethnic identity has become such an important way station in the acceptance of diversity. Perhaps it takes the particularly American stand on pluralism—one we may not have achieved but one we believe in and strive for—to make ethnic identification something forward-looking and positive rather than reactionary and constricted.

Here enters the other event in the odyssey of Albright’s family: returning to Czechoslovakia, happy, vindicated,

*In America
the horrors and
pain of the abandoned world
were simply
pushed out of
one’s ken.*

they were not interested in my school schedule, and when they insisted with increasing nastiness that they would send me to Prague unless I obeyed, my twenty-one-year-old self rebelled and I returned my passport on the spot. I was finished being Czech. I would be someone else. I became once again stateless. Two years later fate blew me to America.

The same fate dropped me after a few months into Connecticut College. This was a profound culture shock for me. I had been out on my own for about five years. Now I had to transform myself into a protected young student who had to be in by seven-thirty. I was given help and well-meaning advice. I was told to listen, to fit in, to learn, not to maintain my own positions. The college was extremely good to me: I was accepted without transcripts and allowed to pick my courses as

survivors of the Holocaust that annihilated their civilization, they were probably ready to resume where they had left off before their exile—rebuilding their country. Perceiving itself as betrayed by the Western alliance in 1938, Czechoslovakia had emotionally turned toward the Soviet Union in a sort of pan-Slavic romanticism of despair. This spirit may have joined with the inherent sense of social justice and decency prevailing in pre-Second World War Czechoslovakia to elect a postwar government that was far to the left. That government was shortly thereafter engulfed by the next betrayal of Czechoslovakia: the Communist takeover and the Stalinization of the country's politics. Many who could fled then, turning their backs definitively on an unbearable past.

So let us assume that Albright's parents took full advantage of the American freedom to reinvent oneself. Like many others, they let go of the past and lived in the present. For their daughter they created a consistent, stable, supportive home environment. She took their version of the truth as her own.

Were there never any doubts, any questions, any inconsistencies? From the study of the Holocaust we know that some families speak of the horror all the time and others never mention it. We also know that children take their cues from parents with respect to what may be mentioned and what must remain unspoken. Questions that create discomfort are often dropped, and areas of hidden conflict acquire agreed-upon emotional maps honored by all: these boundaries will not be disturbed.

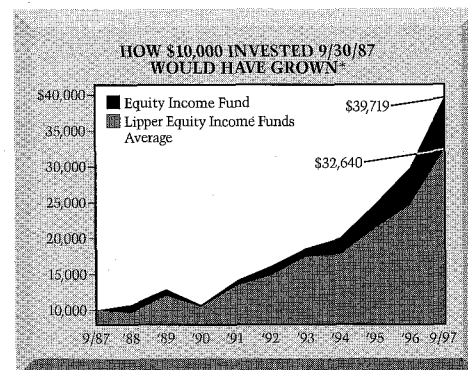
Almost all the members of my father's extended family perished in the camps. We spoke about it very little, and then mostly in terms of information: yes, this one went first, and this one was sent there. No questions asked, no questions encouraged, no questions answered. It does not seem peculiar to me that a conversation about Albright's grandparents might have limited itself to a mention of the horrors of dying during the war, without inviting inquiry into specifics. As for me, sorting out the various bits of truth, reality, and belongingness, along with their emotional tonalities, and shaping them into some sort of reliable identity have remained the work of a lifetime. ☼

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When Is a Planet Not a Planet?

*Arguments for
and against demoting Pluto*

THE planet Pluto has been shrinking at an alarming rate for some time now. Well, not actually shrinking—rather, our awareness of how small Pluto is has been growing.

Upon its discovery, in 1930, scientists trumpeted that Pluto was about as large as Earth. By the 1960s textbooks were listing it as having a diameter about half that of Earth. In 1978

by David H. Freedman

astronomers discovered that Pluto has a relatively large moon, whose brightness had been mistakenly lumped in with the planet's; when this was taken into account, Pluto was left with a diameter about a sixth that of Earth, or less than half that of Mercury—long considered the runt of the solar system. Seven moons in the solar system are bigger than Pluto.

In addition to being out of place among the planets in terms of size, Pluto has always seemed conceptually lost as well. The four innermost planets are rocky and of modest size; the next four are gas giants. What was a lone, tiny ice ball doing way out at the edge of the solar system? A surprising answer has emerged over the past few years. Pluto, it turns out, is one of at least sixty, and possibly hundreds of thousands of, small, cometlike objects in a belt that extends far beyond the confines of the planets.

This discovery, while providing a scientifically satisfying answer to a long-standing mystery, has also raised a question that has proved to be painful for many astronomers: Is Pluto truly a planet? A growing number of solar-system scientists assert that Pluto's minuteness and its membership in a swarm of like objects mean that it should be classified a "minor planet," as asteroids and comets are. Others are outraged by the idea, insisting that regardless of how its identity has changed, demoting Pluto would dishonor astronomical history and confuse the public. In the end, the debate boils down to this question: What compromises in precision should scientists make in the name of tradition, sentiment, and good public relations?

Leading the assault on Pluto's planet-hood is Brian Marsden, who for thirty years has been the director of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), the worldwide nexus for comet and asteroid sightings. Marsden appears to be an unlikely agent of change. In his small office in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he is surrounded by so many teetering piles of paper that he seems to be not sitting in the office so much as embedded in it. Marsden is short and ruddy-faced; his chin and neck are lost to rotundity, and his wispy white hair is arranged in the style of an explosion. But as he makes his case against planet Pluto, his initially soft, stammering, English-accented rumble becomes the resonant boom of an exasperated lecturer. "Pluto has been a long-standing myth that's difficult to kill," he says.

Marsden doesn't have anything against Pluto itself. Quite the contrary: a life spent

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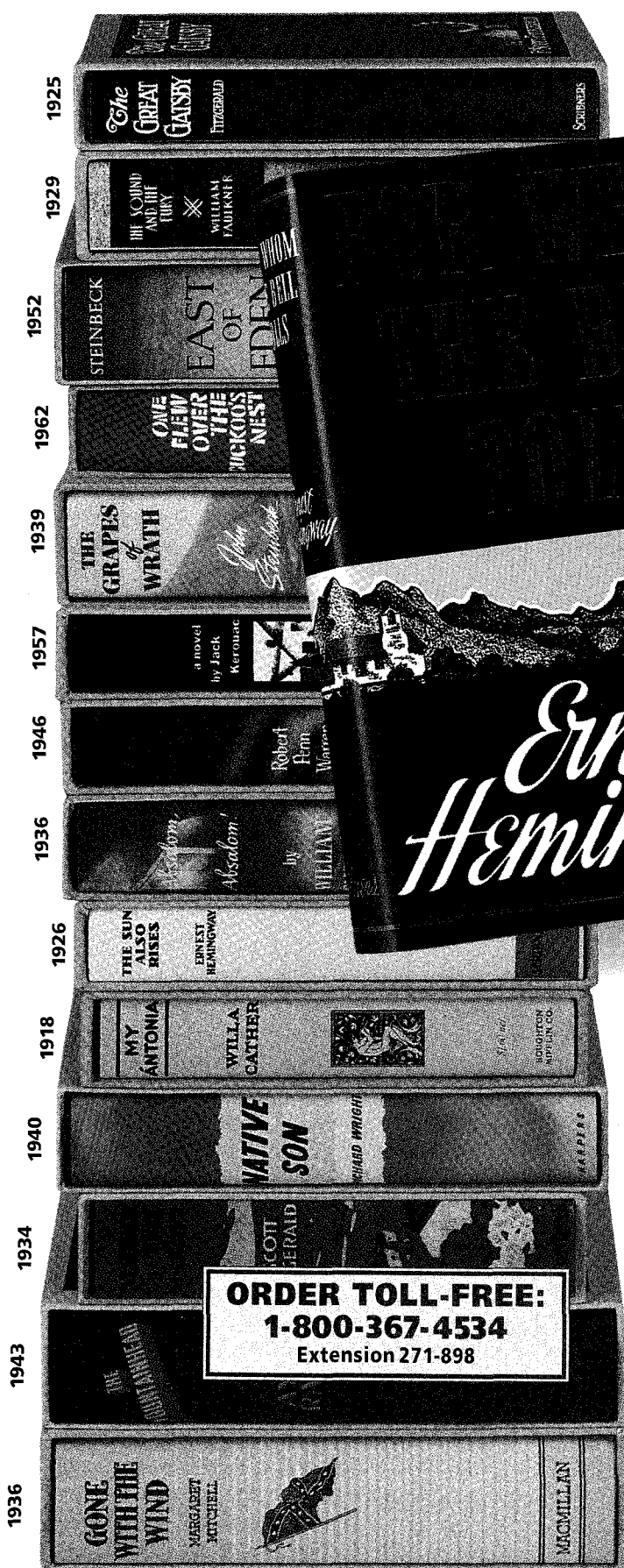
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trying to calculate the complex orbits of the tiniest celestial objects has left him with a fondness for the one planet whose location a hundred years from now cannot be precisely predicted. However, people wouldn't find Pluto's history of planethood quite so deserving of celebration, Marsden says, if they were aware of the circumstances under which that planethood was obtained.

The famous "search for Planet X," which culminated in Pluto's discovery, was the pet project of Percival Lowell, a Boston Brahmin and amateur astronomer who around the turn of the century became obsessed with two notions: that Martians had constructed canals on the surface of their planet, and that tiny, gravity-induced wiggles in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune indicated that a planet with a mass some six times that of Earth lay farther out. Lowell built and endowed an impressive observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, to prove himself right, but he died in 1916 without having succeeded on either count. The observatory's directors, aware that their institution was something of a laughingstock because of the Martian search, were determined to salvage its reputation by finding the at least marginally less improbable Planet X. They hired a young amateur astronomer by the name of Clyde Tombaugh to do the grunt work involved. Tombaugh proved to be resourceful and diligent beyond all reasonable expectations, and more or less single-handedly picked dim Pluto out of a thick

massive Planet X of Lowell's fancy, the observatory directors launched a public-relations blitz designed to link the two inextricably in the public's mind, and also minimized the opportunities for other astronomers to gather contradictory evidence. The observatory withheld news of the discovery for nearly a month, until the seventy-fifth anniversary of Lowell's birth—even while its orbit was carrying Pluto away from clear observability. After the announcement the observatory refused for six weeks more to release the details needed to find Pluto. Lowell's name and prediction were plastered all over the observatory's press releases, though Tombaugh was barely mentioned, and only in later releases. After briefly considering naming the new object for Lowell or his widow, the observatory chose the name Pluto, largely because a symbol for it—**P**—could be fashioned out of Percival Lowell's initials.

In the ensuing euphoria over the apparent discovery of a new planet (elation was especially pronounced in the United States, where the public was happy to welcome the first "American" planet to the solar system), those voices that questioned Pluto's size were drowned out, and the IAU awarded Pluto official planet status. It wasn't an entirely unreasoned decision. As the observatory argued, Pluto had been found close to where Lowell had predicted Planet X ought to be if it was causing those orbital wiggles (though Tombaugh, skeptical of Lowell's predictions, hadn't focused his search on that area), so it would be quite a coincidence if this new object *wasn't* the enormous Planet X. Besides, if the object was small, it shouldn't have been visible at all so far away from Earth.

Unless, that is, this new object happened to have a highly reflective icy surface, like that of a comet—which eventually proved to be the case. Pluto is much too small to account for the wiggles on which Lowell had based his predictions. Not that that matters, for there *were* no wiggles—the observations that had implied them were erroneous. And even if there had been wiggles, they probably wouldn't have led astronomers to Planet X, because Lowell's calculations were dubious at best. It was sheer coincidence that Pluto happened to be at the predicted spot. And so it was on a staircase of mistakes, hubris, and hype

that Pluto was elevated to planethood.

Marsden has publicly questioned Pluto's planethood for nearly two decades. His case picked up steam in the early 1990s, when the astronomers David Jewitt, of the University of Hawaii, and Jane Luu, of Harvard, began spotting cometlike objects just beyond Neptune's orbit. Some followed paths almost exactly like Pluto's highly elliptical and oddly angled loop—an orbit vastly different from those of the eight other planets. Marsden was convinced that the new objects finally explained Pluto's niche in the solar system. "It all fell into place," he says. "Pluto has more in common with comets than it does with planets."

Jewitt and Luu have now discovered sixty objects in what has come to be known as the Kuiper Belt, named after the astronomer Gerard Kuiper, who suggested the existence of such a belt in the 1950s. About a third of them are in Pluto-like orbits, and all of them appear to be, like Pluto, amalgams of ice and rock. As a result, few astronomers now question that Pluto should be regarded as a member of the Kuiper Belt. But does that mean it shouldn't be considered a planet? After all, though Pluto's diameter of approximately 1,400 miles makes it tiny for a planet, it is huge for a Kuiper Belt object; the next largest known member is only about 300 miles across.

Actually, Marsden points out, astronomers have had to ask themselves this sort of question before, and under circumstances that could be seen as clearly establishing a precedent for Pluto. When the small, rocky body later named Ceres was discovered between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, in 1801, it was proclaimed a planet. A year later a second rocky body was found in a similar orbit; several other discoveries along the same lines soon followed. Even though the approximately 600-mile-wide Ceres is nearly twice the size of the next largest asteroid, it was evident that it was merely the largest member of what we now call the asteroid belt. In 1802 Ceres's planethood was summarily revoked.

Marsden sees little ambiguity in the situation: Pluto should follow Ceres's trail into nonplanethood. "If you are going to call Pluto a planet, there is no reason why you cannot call Ceres a planet," he says. And no one, he points out, is campaign-

(Continued on page 32)

*In the euphoria over
the discovery of a
new planet, questions
about Pluto's size
were drowned out.*

field of stars—a feat that is still considered one of the most impressive in the history of observational astronomy.

Though some leading astronomers of the day, along with Tombaugh himself, suspected from the beginning that the newly discovered object was not the

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Classical Music

BY AUSTIN BAER



Bryn Terfel (right)

A MORE PERFECT UNION

Just about everyone acknowledges that *The Marriage of Figaro* is the perfect opera. But where is a perfect cast? Record collectors (a fanatical breed) and hoarders of pirated tapes (still more fanatical) tend to find their favorites in the archives. True enough, stellar artists have been serving Mozart's wondrous comedy gloriously since the dawn of recorded sound, but the parade continues. This month the Lyric Opera of Chicago fields what would rank as a dream ensemble in any age (February 11–March 8; 312-332-2244, ext. 500). At the top of the comedy's social ladder are Håkan Hagegård and Renée Fleming as the jealous philanderer Count Almaviva and his dejected Countess. Bryn Terfel and Elizabeth Futral appear as their quick-witted servants Figaro and his bride-to-be, Susanna, on whom the Count has cast his roving eye. Susan Graham adds to the erotic confusion as the skirt-chasing pageboy Cherubino, aflame with teenage hormones. Critics often say that although today's opera stars have a facility with different styles and languages which earlier generations would envy, they lack the spark of personality. In the case of the Lyric's *Figaro* team no such complaint applies. Terfel, in particular, is a grand original. As Figaro, he never leaves any doubt of his tenderness for Susanna, yet he has a temper. Departing from sprightly tradition, he plays a possessive man and a dangerous one. The opera ends on a famously conciliatory note, but the play by Beaumarchais on which it is based was incendiary: a harbinger if not indeed a cause of the French Revolution. Without playing Mozart false, Terfel brings out the undercurrents.

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.

ANOTHER SEASON UNDER HIS BATON

Other orchestras tour with their music directors. For the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra that is not an option. Unlike any other symphony orchestra of significant standing, the VPO is self-governing. The players themselves, not some authority figure with a stick, take charge of shaping their collective identity. For its annual visits to Carnegie Hall since 1984—concerts invariably numbered among the season's brightest—the VPO has deliberately rotated maestros, drawing from an all-star stable including Karajan, Solti, Bernstein, Maazel, Abbado, Levine, Ozawa, and Barenboim. This year's leader is Riccardo Muti, which is cause for special celebration. His seasons as the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, from 1980 to 1992, live in memory as a golden age, but of late the maestro has been a stranger to his American public, divid-



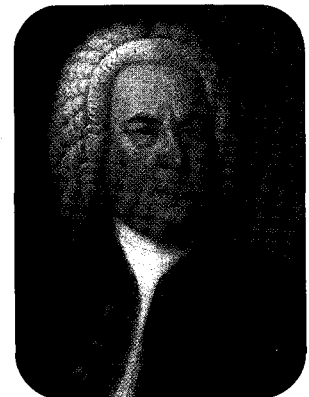
Riccardo Muti conducting the VPO

ing his time chiefly between Milan's fabled opera house, La Scala, and the VPO. An immaculate technician blessed with a rare dramatic intensity and an exceptional flair for pulse and color, Muti has long enjoyed a unique rapport with the VPO. Paradoxically, material that the players possess as if by birthright sounds under his baton not "classical" but fresh-minted. The New York programs begin with Mozart, in which the Muti-VPO partnership sets standards for transparency, grace, and sense of drama. Muti makes no specialty of Mahler, whose largely tortured, self-lacerating canon he mostly leaves to others, but his reading with the VPO of the sunny Symphony No. 4 casts a golden glow. Beethoven, Brahms, and Hindemith complete what will surely be three evenings to remember (February 27–March 1; 212-247-7800).

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BACH

In the history of Western painting and sculpture Jesus Christ has been a superstar for centuries. In music only Johann Sebastian Bach ever brought Him to life in any fashion that music lovers and the faithful deem sufficient. In fact, he did so more than once, but most memorably in the majestic *St. Matthew Passion*. The oratorio interpolates ornate arias and chorales in a congregational style into a setting of the gospel text that is mostly spare in the extreme. The part of Jesus adds not a syllable to what we read in the Bible. Except for His last words ("My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"), His utterances are accompanied by the string section, creating a halo of sound, but only once does the vocal line rise to true song. The passage occurs during the Last Supper, when Jesus invites the disciples to drink the wine. This month, in performances by the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur, these haunting lines are entrusted to Matthias Goerne (February 12–17; 212-875-5030). At Easter time Wolfgang Holzmair delivers them with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa, in Boston (April 8–11; 617-

266-1200) and at Carnegie Hall (April 15, 16; 212-247-7800). These are artists between whom it is simply impossible to choose. Goerne's is the more dramatic instrument, Holzmair's the more lyrical. But on recent albums of Schubert songs (Goerne's on Hyperion and London, Holzmair's on Philips) both baritones

Bach's *Passion* comes alive

reveal the same almost scary ability to dive beneath the surface, capturing in an inflection the deepest, most evanescent states of soul and mind.

Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

THE WOODSTOCK OF THE MCCARTHY ERA

Although songs are usually lame vehicles for the serious examination of political issues, they do provide inspiration and fortitude when



Paul Robeson at the Peace Arch, 1952

it's time to act. In American history nobody understood this power of music better than Paul Robeson. Next year is the centennial of his birth, and Folk Era (705 S. Washington St., Naperville, IL 60540-6654; 630-637-2303) is seizing the day by issuing *The Peace Arch Concerts*, a live recording of Robeson singing one

foot from the Canadian border in 1952 and 1953, when the U.S. government had revoked his passport and forbidden him foreign travel. Previously available only to members of the Mine-Mill and Smelters Workers' Union in the early fifties, the concerts have been transferred from the original 78s to compact disc. The sound quality isn't perfect (Robeson was singing from the back of a pickup truck), but his amazing bass voice cuts through everything. "Ol' Man River" was written for him, after all, and nobody ever sang it better. Convinced of humanity's essential unity, Robeson sang songs from many lands (in twenty different languages) long before "world music" was even a concept. Here he shines most on the spirituals, with their obvious relevance to the nascent civil-rights movement, and on the labor anthem "Joe Hill." The final cut is one of Robeson's few recorded speeches, in which he discussed the FBI's largely successful attempts to destroy his performing career by threatening concert promoters. His defiance is exhilarating, and far more dangerous than anything the punk movement managed to snarl. —C.M.Y.

WHERE TUBAS DARE TO GO

ix tubas and a rhythm section may suggest some kind of raw, rambling joke. Under the direction of the prodigious Howard Johnson, however, they form Gravity, a conclave of low brass players that has been around in various forms since 1968. On *Right Now!* (Verve), Johnson and company deliver a spirited, wide-ranging program that proves that even the lowest instrumental voices can soar. Gravity's sonorous blend enhances all kinds of material, from the tender ballad "Tell Me a Bed-time Story" and the relaxed big-band staple "Frame for the Blues" to charging evocations of Gil Evans and hard bop. Taj Mahal, who toured with a smaller version of Gravity in 1971, adds gritty funk with vocals on three tracks. The tubas are the main story, however. Dave Barger, Joe Daley, Earl McIntyre, and Bob Stewart, musicians who are generally buried



Getting down: Howard Johnson

in the brass sections of the big bands, take eloquent solo turns, and the non-soloing Carl Kleinstein handles most of the lead playing with admirable warmth. Johnson is deservedly the star. He arranged all the music, spreading the voicings in a manner that best takes advantage of the range and dexterity of his partners, and he roars through his several tuba solos. For variety Johnson, who is one of jazz's most inventive multi-instrumentalists, even switches to penny

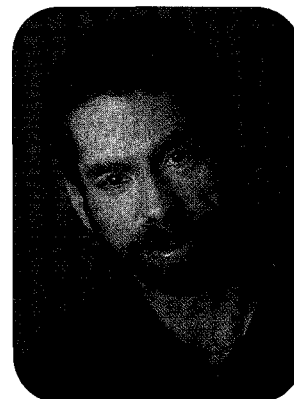
whistle and baritone saxophone on two tracks. Not that changes of pace were required, with Gravity demonstrating just how much music can be found in the depths. —B.B.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.

Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

INTERPRETING MONK

As a composer, Thelonious Monk was the master of jagged dissonance and inexorable swing. As a pianist, Fred Hersch is one of the most sensitive and genuinely lyrical players in jazz. This might imply that *Thelonious: Fred Hersch Plays Monk* (Nonesuch) is an oil-and-water affair. Instead this triumphant recital should convince any skeptics of the depth of both composer and performer. Hersch decided to play this music his way rather than in direct imitation, which has produced uncommonly introspective readings of Monk's ballads. By employing his gentler touch and more impressionistic harmonic vocabulary, Hersch reinforces the melodic integrity of Monk's music while allowing it to accommodate a different range of colors. The compositions are also programmed to comment on one another and themselves, as Hersch applies five different slants to the blues "Misterioso," sets up one ballad with a snippet of another, and employs "Round Midnight" as a parenthetical frame for the entire enterprise. Hersch is becoming something of a songbook king, having previously produced volumes of music by Billy Strayhorn and Rodgers & Hammerstein for Nonesuch. He is also jazz's most committed AIDS activist, and his second collection for Classical Action: Performing Arts Against AIDS appeared at the close of last year. *Fred Hersch and Friends: The Duo Album* finds him interpreting standards with a dozen notable friends (including Gary Burton, Tommy Flanagan, Diana Krall, and Joe Lovano) and highlights one aspect of Hersch's talent that solo recordings by definition ignore: an affinity for other musicians. —B.B.



The pianist Fred Hersch

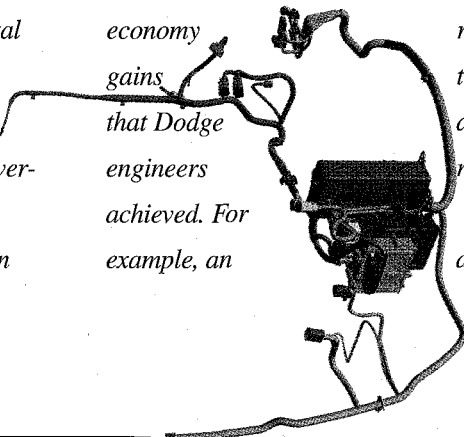
STEVE J. SHERMAN



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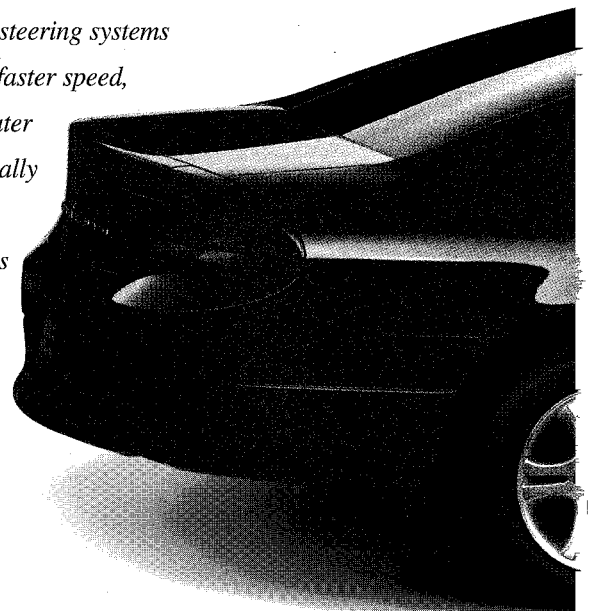
Consider the newest version of Dodge's Powertrain Control Module. Communicating over an

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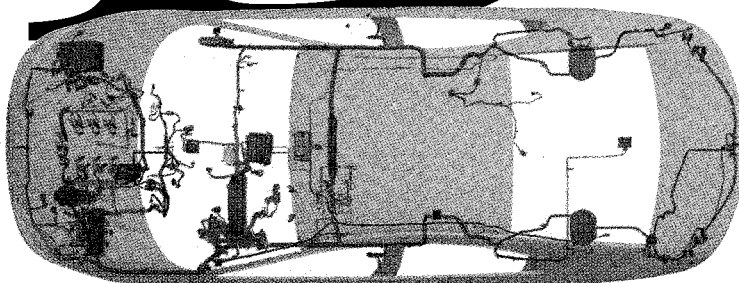


advanced knock-control system can distinguish between noise and engine knock. Consequently, it is able to maintain optimum ignition advance. The result is improved efficiency and power. To further enhance fuel economy, this remarkable on-board computer has the ability to achieve a low idle speed for minimum fuel consumption. When charging or power-steering systems require a faster speed, the computer automatically raises it. Intrepid's available

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Dance and Theater

BY NANCY DALVA AND JOHN ISEL

WRITER ON THE RISE

If *Angela's Ashes* didn't knock the blarney out of you, Martin McDonagh's fierce and funny dramatic fables should. A twenty-seven-year-old Londoner born to Irish parents, McDonagh dropped out of school at sixteen and started writing "to avoid having a real job." He's got one now. This month marks the second anniversary of his debut with *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, at the Druid Theatre Company, in Galway, Ireland. Since then, like no other playwright in modern memory, McDonagh has enjoyed meteoric success and accolades (he has had four critically acclaimed plays running simultaneously in London). Offering further adulation feels a bit like bringing a beer into an Irish bar. But crack open the script of,

Scene from *The Cripple of Inishmaan*

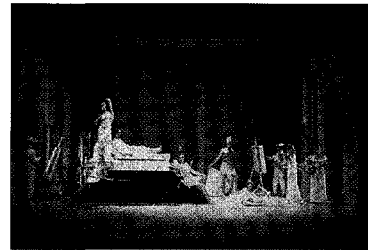
say, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, available in the *Paris Review* (Spring 1997)—the longest piece the magazine has run since Philip Roth's novella *Goodbye, Columbus*—and the dialogue rocks and reels off the page, summoning the guardian spirits of Synge, Beckett, and O'Casey. Better yet—go see *Beauty Queen*, which, with three out of four members of the original cast, has its U.S. premiere off-Broadway at the Atlantic Theater Company (212-239-6200) on February 11, or catch *The Cripple of Inishmaan* when it opens on March 10 at New York's Public Theater (212-260-2400), under Jerry Zaks's direction. But be warned. McDonagh's Eire is an anti-Eden, peopled by characters as earthbound as peat and potatoes and as acerbic and bitter as the home-distilled poteen with which they drink themselves toward unattainable dreams. Inspired by the Brothers Grimm, McDonagh views his plays as "just stories . . . little things." But like coal compressed for millenia, these tiny tales yield glimmerings of light. —J.I.

Nancy Dalva is the author of *Dance Ink: Photographs*.

John Isel is a senior editor at Stagebill.

TWO PLAYS THAT PACK A PUNCH

In this month American Repertory Theatre (617-547-8300), in Cambridge, Massachusetts, juggles two ideological wrestling matches—Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (through March 21), directed by Andrei Serban, featuring the wild and wooing Petruchio in one corner and a very un-bonny Kate in the other; and Brecht's parable about American capitalism, *In the Jungle of Cities* (through March 14), staged by Robert Woodruff, in which Garga and Schlink square off after the playwright's prologue admonishing audiences, "Don't worry your heads about the motives for the fight, keep your minds on the stakes." Brecht, who once suggest-

Serban's staging of *Twelfth Night*

ed that theater should have the atmosphere of a boxing match, where audiences can puff cigars, won't get it at the smoke-free Loeb Drama Center. But he'd be pleased by the artistic director

Robert Brustein's choice of directors. Serban and Woodruff, the Don Kings of American experimental directing, both deliver sharp jabs and roundhouse rights to encrusted classics. ART audiences know Serban for his revivals of the fairy tale *The*

King Stag, with masks, puppets, and costumes by Julie Taymor. Woodruff once staged *The Comedy of Errors* as a circus featuring the Flying Karamazovs, drag queens, and clowns. At both these current shows expect an early knockout. —J.I.

MUST-SEES FROM THE WINTER REPERTORY

Io see a dancer grow in a company, moving from the back row to center stage; to see a company grow in a dance, with newcomers taking on old roles in new ways: these are the abiding pleasures of attending dance programs not from time to time but all the time, as much as one can. My hometown ballet company happens to be The New York City Ballet, and in February it promises to be a superlative refuge. The winter repertory includes forty-seven

(whose originator, Maria Tallchief, set the stage ablaze); and other Balanchini-ana, including that indispensable benchmark of modernity *The Four Temperaments*, an utterly perfect work to Hindemith. On the light side, the Gershwin delight *Who Cares?* returns, with its fluffy Hershey Kay orchestrations. It is the ballet equivalent of bubble bath, and I can hardly wait to jump in. (Through March 1 at Lincoln Center; 212-870-5570 or 212-307-4100.) —N.D.

George Balanchine's *Firebird*

works, among them significant "last chances" (final performances before a ballet goes out of rep for a time) and re-entries from the Balanchine canon. Not to miss: the returning 1967 three-act dazzler *Jewels*, and the departing *Scotch Symphony*, a misty and tender work one might think of as Balanchine's *Brigadoon*. Also back: *Divertimento No. 15*, set to Mozart; *Duo Concertant*, set to Stravinsky, as is the fabulous star vehicle *Firebird*

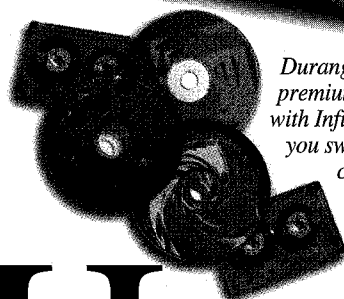
 The New Dodge

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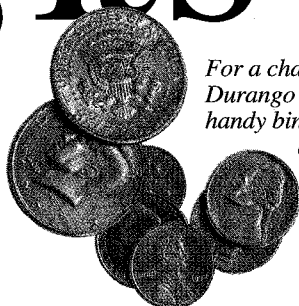
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(Continued from page 24)

ing to have Ceres's planethood restored.

It would help if "planet" had a formal definition against which Pluto could be measured, but none exists. Astronomy got by quite nicely for thousands of years on a we-know-one-when-we-see-one basis. But now that questions about Pluto are forcing the issue, many astronomers find themselves gravitating toward one or the other of two proposed definitions. The first is "a non-moon, sun-orbiting body large enough to have gravitationally 'swept out' almost everything else near its orbit." Among the nine planets Pluto alone fails this test, and it does so spectacularly, owing to the Kuiper Belt. The second is "a non-moon, sun-orbiting body large enough to have gravitationally pulled itself into a roughly spherical shape." Pluto passes this test—but so do Ceres, a half dozen or so other asteroids, and possibly some other members of the Kuiper Belt. "It's very difficult to come up with a physically meaningful definition under which we'd have nine planets," says Hal Levison, an astronomer at the Southwest Research Institute, in Boulder, Colorado.

DOES it matter what we call Pluto? Marsden insists that it does. By calling Pluto a planet, he says, astronomers perpetuate a distorted and thoroughly outdated image of a solar system that neatly ends in a ninth planet, rather than trailing off beyond Neptune into a far-reaching and richly populated field of objects. "It gives a misleading impression to the public and particularly to schoolchildren," he says. "We ought to be explaining that there are four giant planets, four terrestrial planets, two belts of minor bodies, and scattered interesting material."

At the forefront of those who reject such proposals is the observational astronomer and author David Levy. Levy is about as different from Marsden as two people who are longtime friends and equally esteemed in one field can be. Whereas the Oxford-educated Marsden spends most of his time working out the mathematics of orbits, rarely so much as peeking through a telescope, Levy has for years risen at 4:00 A.M. to nuzzle up to an eyepiece in the cold Arizona desert, hoping to spot new comets. (Among his twenty-one cometary discoveries is Shoemaker-Levy 9, which crashed spec-

tacularly into Jupiter in 1994.) The low-key, amiable Levy is an astronomical Will Rogers to Marsden's excitable don.

Levy opens his case for Pluto by suggesting that it is too big to be called a minor planet, noting that if it rested on Kansas, it would block out the sun over more than half of the United States. He then casts his vote for the "spherical" definition of a planet, conceding that Ceres could sneak in under this rubric. However, Levy is not about to argue that Ceres should be reclassified. "Ceres has been an asteroid for a long time; it's easier to leave things as they are," he says. In any case, he adds, it's a mistake to frame the debate in terms of technical definitions, because something more important than precision is at stake. "This isn't about science, or things," he says. "It's about people."

The person it seems to be most about is Clyde Tombaugh, who died early last year at the age of ninety. Levy dates his own interest in astronomy back to an evening when he was twelve and his father described to him, over the dinner table, how Tombaugh, a twenty-four-year-old observatory assistant without a college degree and literally right off the farm, had carried out his brilliant search. Levy later became very friendly with Tombaugh, and wrote a biography of him. "I promised him I would always argue in favor of Pluto's remaining a planet," he says. "Clyde is gone now, but his wife, Patsy, is still here, and I think changing Pluto's status would be extremely disrespectful."

It would also be disrespectful to the public, Levy argues, and to children in particular. "Kids like Pluto," he says. The story of Ceres's demotion isn't relevant, he claims, given that the public has never really thought of Ceres as a planet. Rather, he holds up the case of the brontosaurus. Early in the century paleontologists realized that the apatosaurus and the brontosaurus were actually the same creature; one of them had to go. Taxonomic convention dictates that the first-named species—in this case, the apatosaurus—subsume the second. And so it was that scientists dutifully declared the much-admired brontosaurus nonexistent. "Sure it's a rule, but every kid knows what a brontosaurus is," Levy says. "Why couldn't they have made an exception?" The brontosaurus has, of course, proved unsinkable in common

usage. If astronomers ignore Pluto's place in popular culture, Levy warns, then popular culture could ignore them.

Levy further argues that the PR debacle that could result from a demotion of Pluto might well turn around and bite astronomers. One of his biggest concerns is

*Astronomers began
spotting cometlike
objects in orbits almost
exactly like Pluto's
odd loop.*

that NASA would decide not to fund the *Pluto Express*, a proposed unmanned fly-by mission to Pluto, under consideration for launching around 2003. To Pluto-philes, this mission is the ne plus ultra of scientific discovery; there are things we simply cannot know about an object until we go right on up to it. "I think that downgrading Pluto would kill the mission," Levy says. (For the record, NASA's director, Daniel Goldin, denies that Pluto's planethood or lack thereof would have any effect whatsoever on NASA's plans, and adds that Pluto the Kuiper Belt object is still fundamentally interesting.)

Fortunately for Levy and other supporters of planet Pluto, the Norwegian astronomer Kaare Aksnes is firmly among their number. Aksnes heads the IAU's Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature, which has the power to force a vote on the question among astronomers worldwide—the only possible route to an official downgrading. Aksnes says he has no interest in putting the matter before the committee—like Levy, he believes that reclassifying Pluto would be a disservice to Tombaugh and to history—and that even if the subject does come up, he has already ensured that it won't garner enough votes to make it out of committee.

But there is reason for Marsden and his like-minded colleagues to take heart as well. There's nothing in the rules to stop the IAU from officially adding the designation "minor planet" to Pluto's label, so that Pluto would enjoy a sort of celestial

dual citizenship. In fact, there's some precedent for this: asteroid No. 2060 also became comet 95P when it was observed to have grown a cometary tail. More important, the chairman of the IAU's committee on small bodies' names, the University of Maryland astronomer Michael A'Hearn, is amenable to the idea. Marsden himself is the committee member responsible for assigning minor planets the numbers by which they are officially known, and he has one already picked out for Pluto: asteroid No. 10,000. The committee can only make recommendations, however, and if it does recommend the added label, it can expect a fight when the vote goes before the full body of the IAU. That's because some planet-Pluto boosters regard the dual-citizenship plan the way the National Rifle Association regards proposals to ban assault rifles—as a superficially reasonable step that must be fought tooth and nail because it would give the enemy momentum.

In any case, Pluto doesn't need an official ruling to move into minor planet-hood. It could happen on a de facto basis, and it probably will. If textbooks begin

to present Pluto as a minor planet, the teachers who use those books will almost certainly follow, along with their students. And unlike the generally conservative astronomy community, the textbook industry tends to favor new points of view—if it didn't, there wouldn't be so much need for new textbooks.

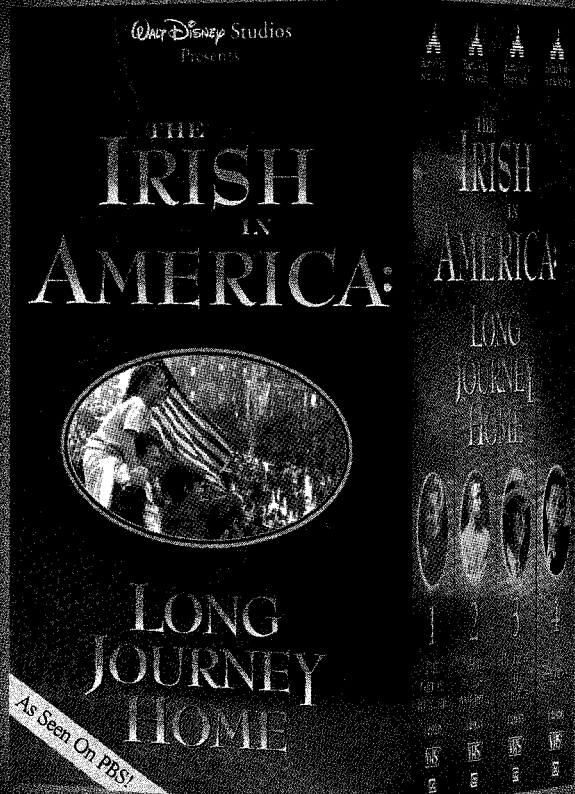
Some of the newest astronomy textbooks, in fact, are already openly questioning Pluto's status. William Hartmann, the author of one of the most popular series of astronomy textbooks in the United States, and a recent winner of the American Astronomical Society's Carl Sagan medal for communicating planetary science to the public, refers to Pluto as an "interplanetary body" in his newest books. Though he continues to include Pluto in his table of the planets, to avoid making teachers' lesson plans obsolete, he feels increasingly uncomfortable about doing so. "It's very important in the grand scheme of things for human beings to be able to picture the rest of the universe in the right conceptual terms," he says. "The way we organize things in our heads comes from the names we give

those things, and that's particularly important to remember as we teach those names to the next generation."

Many teachers aren't waiting for textbooks to make the jump. I was surprised to learn recently that my twelve-year-old daughter already knows about the debate—it turns out that critically examining Pluto's planetary status is now part of the sixth-grade science curriculum in my town. Dozens of World Wide Web pages address the issue, many of them put up by teachers and students. The inevitable result is that more and more children will grow up thinking of Pluto as the biggest member of a band of icy objects beyond the outermost planet, Neptune. If enough of them become astronomers, the IAU will follow.

Marsden believes, in fact, that this would be the best way for the change to happen. "I am in favor of a more natural evolution, without imposing any edicts," he says.

That seems a reasonable compromise. Even if science can't afford to bend to sentiment, there may be no harm in letting the sentiment die a natural death. ☼



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A Means of Transport

*Building character in the
Moscow metro*

STEPPING onto the rapidly descending escalator at the Belorusskaya Station in the Moscow metro is like going over Niagara Falls without a barrel:

you jump on, and far, far below, at stairs' end,

you discern a sour-faced attendant sitting in her booth, like a boulder you are destined to slam into at falls' bottom.

"Male passenger in the black hat!" she barks over the PA system. "Take that box off the railing! Metro regulations forbid the placing of objects on the railing! Yes,

YOU! TAKE THAT BOX OFF THE RAILING!" The PA system is old; her voice screeches. Even after the passenger has removed the offending box, the attendant continues her

tiresome litany, as if lecturing a brood of impudent schoolchildren for the thousandth time: "Passengers! When stepping off the escalator move QUICKLY to prevent obstructions! Do NOT tarry! Step to the RIGHT to allow those who wish to move ahead free passage on the LEFT!"

To descend into the Moscow metro is

to grapple with the frustration, rancor, and churlishness that beleaguer Muscovites to this day. It was Stalin who launched the construction of the Moskovskiy Metropoliten, in the 1930s. In doing so he provided Muscovites with more than a means of transportation around the capital; he gave them a chance to harden their characters, to temper their spirits in the forge of Soviet misanthropy.

At both ends of the escalators, attendants—usually scowling harridans in blue—hector and berate any passenger who steps out of line, but they select the *chelnoki* (traders who carry their wares in vinyl suitcases) for special vituperation. The *chelnoki* exemplify what older Russians regard as *spekulyanty*, or speculators—those whom Soviet ideology vilified as capitalists earning an illicit living off salt-of-the-earth proletarians. To keep their prices low, *chelnoki* use public transportation (subway and bus rides cost the ruble equivalent of twenty

by Jeffrey Tayler

cents), and therefore end up dragging their bundles through narrow metro turnstiles. Often at the very sight of a *chelnok* an attendant will use her shrill whistle to call in the militia to adjudicate; depending on the bundle's exact dimensions, its transportation may or may not violate metro rules. Violations or no, the hard-working traders hardly deserve the vitriol poured over them, and I feel myself succumbing to the malice set in the features of the Muscovites at my side. I grumble that here even something as simple as riding the metro is cause for a gnashing of teeth.

TODAY I board the escalator and begin the descent, my features defensively settling into a mask of indifference. The passengers floating by on the ascent wear the same masks. We are a surly lot, at least outwardly impervious to whatever scorn or humiliation the metro will throw our way. Everything is as usual. A quadrilateral signal bell rings out through the PA system. I brace myself for the diatribe.

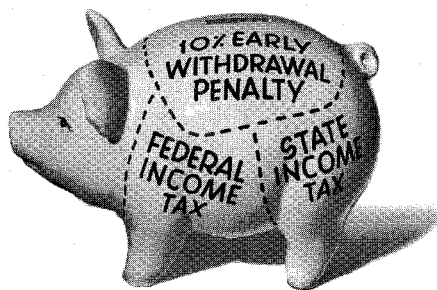
The attendant, a man this time, begins softly. "Passengers. *Dear* passengers. Metro regulations do forbid your placing objects on the railing—as you know. This is for your own good."

Passengers steal puzzled looks at one another. Something is not right.

He continues, his words now resonating with an unmistakably avuncular warmth. "Hold your little tots' hands when boarding, and don't push each other too hard. Husbands, drink less and remember your dear wives! Wives, think of how hard your knights work for you! Be indulgent toward them. All of you, be good to one another. I implore you!" Now the escalator is full of smiles, some gleaming with white enamel, others revealing gold teeth. "There is no need to hurry when stepping off the escalator. As always, the little trains in the Moscow metro will go round and round and round for you. Full steam ahead!"

When I reach his booth, I peer in: the elderly attendant is modestly averting his eyes from those he has regaled. We are a weirdly elated bunch—we want to show this to him, but he looks away. I walk on toward the platform thinking that Stalin's forge of misanthropy, like almost everything else Soviet, failed as often as it succeeded. ☼

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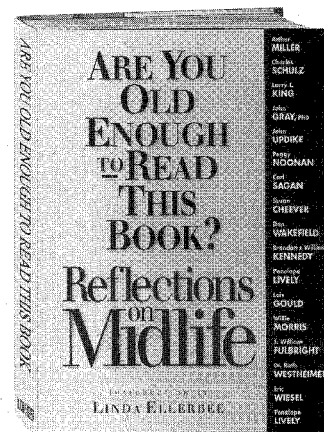
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Inside Anatolia

*Taking the road less
traveled in Turkey, too, makes all
the difference*

EVERY morning the Muslim call to prayer, an adenoidal chant whining from as many as five minarets in Urgüp, our small town in central Turkey, incited roosters and posses of roaming dogs to join the chorus. This curious cacophony was my wake-up call, buried as I was in a windowless

by Hatsy Shields

hollow sculpted from a cliff of soft rock. For a breath of dawn I would bolt from bed around a stairwell to a balcony that looked out over a hillside pockmarked with cave dwellings and across a vast, dusty valley of undulating vineyards planted in tawny volcanic grit. There at eye level one hazy sunrise last

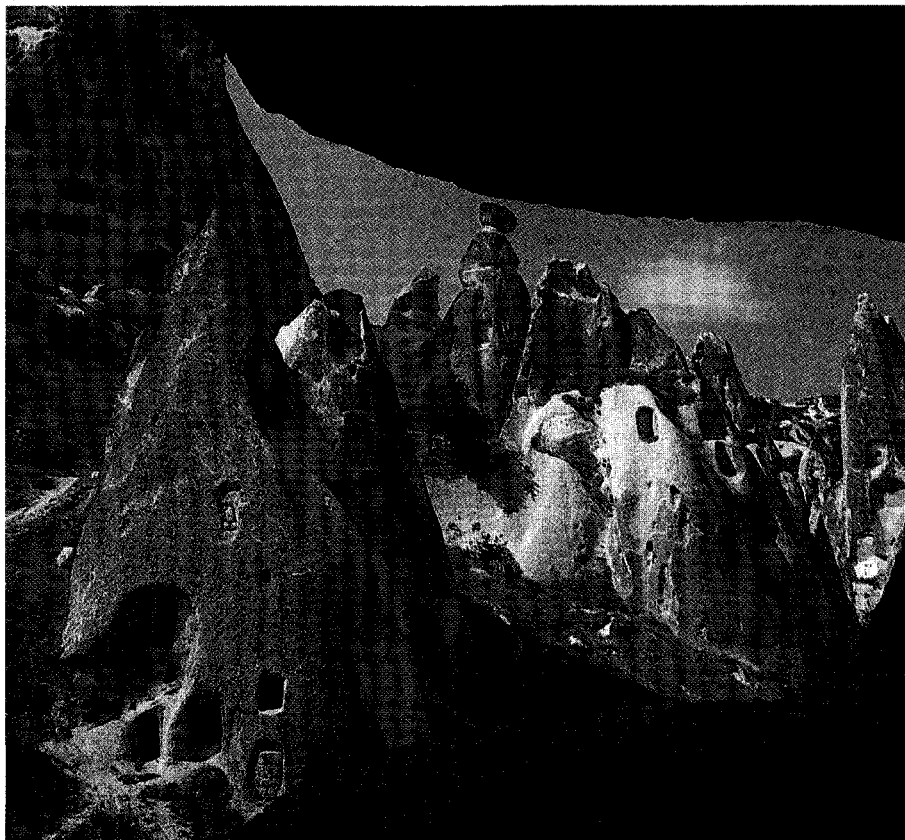
September bobbed sixty, eventually a hundred, brilliantly colored hot-air balloons—gaudy bubbles drifting above the Cappadocian landscape of walnut orchards and erosion-sculpted rock.

Central Anatolia, Turkey's Asian heartland, is mined with surprises, as I discovered on a three-week tour of the country. While the World Air Games whistled by overhead that day in Urgüp, I beamed a flashlight on thousand-year-old Byzantine cave frescoes depicting lovely almond-eyed Marys and baby Jesuses.

My interest in Turkey was first piqued by delighted reports from friends who had recently visited Istanbul, the Greek ruins at Ephesus, and the fishing villages on Turkey's Aegean and Mediterranean coasts. Intriguing though coastal Turkey is, however, cheap cement-block construction is smothering the landscape day by day, as the region strives to accommodate hordes of vacationing sun seekers. There was more, I discovered, to interest me in the less-visited hinterlands, because they remain so visibly engaged in a tug of war between Eastern and Western sensibilities, ancient traditions and modern expectations. A camel driver leading a string of haughty beasts talks on his cellular phone; a veiled cotton picker in baggy flowered trousers squats in the fields silhouetted against a smoke-belching detergent factory; at an outdoor bazaar lacy hand-crocheted doilies are laid out for sale next to a stack of Johnny Cash cassettes. Central Anatolia is a land of double-takes.

ANKARA is the place to start. Kemal Atatürk decreed as much when, in 1923, he anointed the then-dumpy angora-wool trading town the new capital of the Turkish Republic. Ankara sits at a focal point along what for a few thousand years has been a well-traveled continental corridor, Anatolia being the rectangular land bridge over which marauding armies have tramped to and from Asia in the east and Europe in the west. In Ankara I joined a guided tour, organized by IST Cultural Tours, of New York; afterward my husband would meet me for a ramble through the countryside. Having flown

*Cave dwellings in Cappadocia,
in rugged east-central Anatolia*



PETER POULIDES/TONY STONE

SMALL PHOTOGRAPHS ABOVE AND THROUGHOUT BY THE AUTHOR



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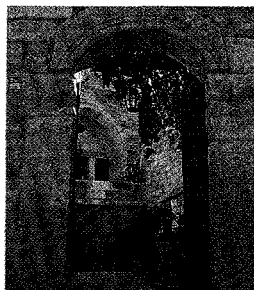
from Istanbul to Ankara on Turkish Airlines (for a reasonable \$60), I stepped off the plane amid a throng of dark-suited, gravely important government types to the beat of "Mustang Sally" pulsating in the cabin.

My tour companions were seven other women, aged twenty-six to eighty-one. Vedat was our shepherd, a tall, doggedly patriotic, and courtly Muslim who agonized over his teenage son's having pierced an ear and applauded his wife for having arranged their daughter's marriage. The daughter, it turns out, is an accomplished translator of economics textbooks. Her arranged marriage caused our group to raise a communal eyebrow, but no one put forth a challenging word. Vedat made his feeling known, however, that there was something a bit peculiar—besmirched, even—about our being at large in the world without men of our own to look after us.

Our itinerary would hook southeast from Ankara through high, arid steppes to ravine-sliced Cappadocia, curl west along the old trade routes and through the lake district, and eventually hit Turkey's western shore midpoint at Kuşadası. Here Bill, my husband, would join me—legitimate at last—and together we would snake inland up into the mountains.

In Turkey you can't knock a clean, air-conditioned bus with an experienced guide and a nonmaniacal driver (a true find) as a means of getting about. Except that being hermetically sealed works only so long for me. Then I get a little crazed. In our rented car Bill and I were free to stop at roadside stands to buy fresh green figs, meander narrow lanes for a closer look at the games Gypsy children play in the dirt, offer a goatherd a Hershey bar for the privilege of taking her picture, and soak up the vibrations of a Roman ruin without the prod of a set schedule.

Still, Vedat's commentary often



Urgüp



Harvesting grapes



Boğazkale

fleshed out the stone monuments our group was trotted past. On the day we visited Atatürk's massive mausoleum, the creamy marble building lined with squared columns stood out against a fiercely blue sky, commanding a clear view of Ankara below—a rare sight in this city of three million where new construction never ends and pollution can be choking. Stone-faced guards patrolled the colonnade after an impressive boot-stomping, gun-wielding routine. From the austere courtyard we climbed gleaming steps to enter the tomb through enormous bronze doors. Under an immense cenotaph, Atatürk is buried directly in the ground on his side facing Mecca, according to Muslim law, Vedat explained. The hall was hushed.

"Of course he is revered," Vedat proclaimed about the great reformer who expelled the invading

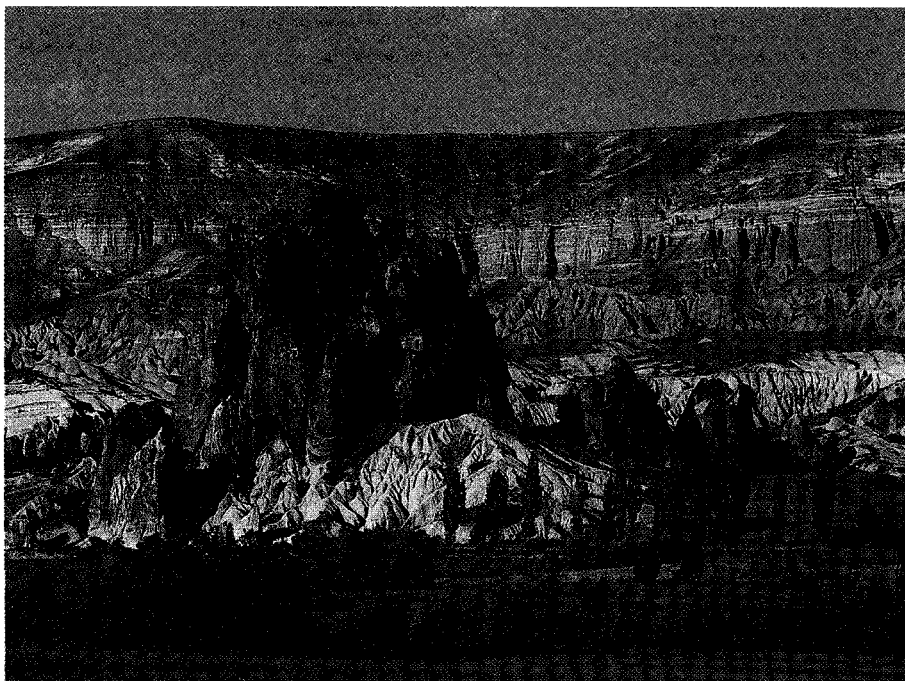
Greeks, re-energized a broken nation, replaced Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, secularized the schools, and abolished polygamy, all in the twenties. Quite

simply, Vedat declared, lifting his chin, "without Atatürk we would be Iran."

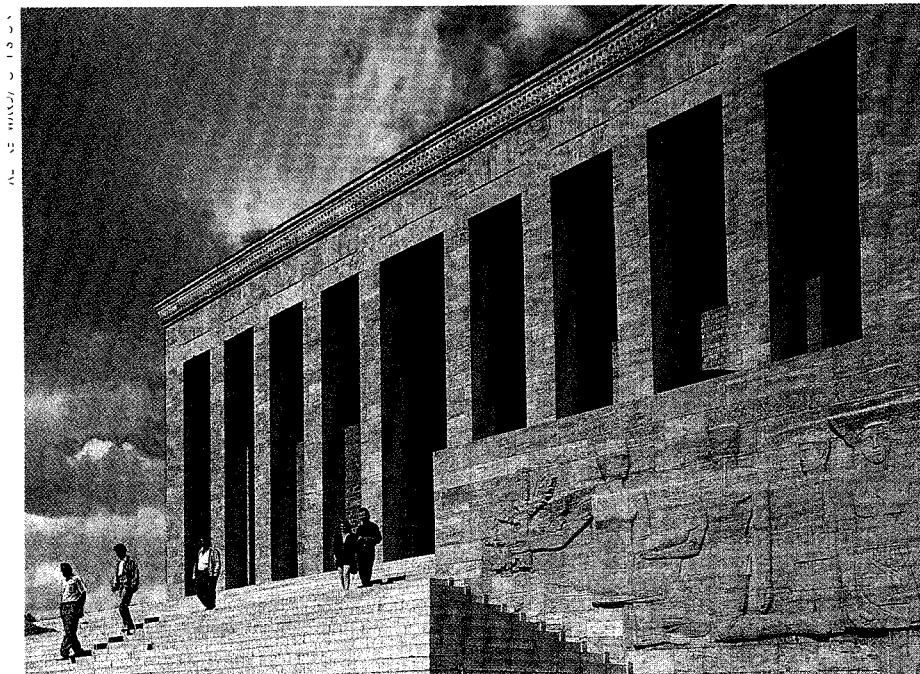
From Ankara our bus sped east past wheat, corn, and sugar-beet fields, many of the farms tidily enclosed by rows of poplar trees. Acres of sunflowers nodded, too heavy with seeds to hold their heads up. Along the roadside bags of onions were neatly stacked next to towering heaps of yellow-and-green-striped melons that wouldn't be ripe until January. Mixed flocks of sheep and goats grazed on beige stubble. We kept an eye out for the occasional white angora goat, whose soft hair has been highly valued forever. As the story goes, when Queen Victoria requested a herd of her own, the crafty Anatolian goatherds shipped barren does to the United Kingdom. Less than amused, the monarch sent her own emissaries to make the next selection. "But, of course, good wool will not grow in England—so wet," Vedat proclaimed with satisfaction.

In order to absorb the meaning of the Hittite ruins at Boğazkale, I tried to delve backward in time to 1600 B.C. Even though I knew I was surrounded by some of the most remarkable late Bronze Age finds in archaeological history, amounting to the rocky foundations of a city of 20,000, my own frame of reference kept elbowing its way into the picture. Walking through the dark, cleverly engineered subterranean stone pas-

Volcanic rock formations jut out of a Cappadocian valley



PETER POULIDES/TONY STONEFELDS



*In Ankara, the colonnade
fronting Atatürk's mausoleum*

sage leading to a 4,000-year-old citadel, I was suddenly milling with a crowd in a tunnel to the Yale Bowl. Maybe it was the light. Instead of hot-dog vendors and raccoon coats at the other end, we were met by dark-eyed hucksters who reached into their jackets to flash hand-carved onyx horses or tablets etched with preposterous erotic poses.

"For heaven's sake, let's not encourage this behavior," one of our well-traveled members said. "The thing is," another countered, "I really love those green sandstone medallions. And think about it—it is their living." With world-class shoppers on board, the bus filled up with copper oil lamps, stuffed toy camels, embroidered vests, silk prayer rugs, peasant dolls, and leather ottomans. There may even have been a drum.

We fast-forwarded 2,000 years while driving south to the Cappadocian cave churches. In the historical interim waves of invaders washed over Anatolia: Phrygians, Persians, Alexander the Great's Greeks, Romans. Constantine moved the center of the Roman Empire to the Bosphorus in A.D. 330 and on his deathbed converted to Christianity. By the sixth century A.D., when the great Byzantine Emperor Justinian married a showgirl, reconquered lost lands, and built the magnificent Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople, monastic communities had

been established among the "fairy chimneys," the guidebooks' phrase for Cappadocia's tall volcanic stone formations. These wind- and water-carved tufa towers with basalt helmets appear, ahem, unmistakably anatomical. At a lookout over a valley full of these extraordinary protrusions I caught two German women glancing wordlessly at each other and stifling snorts of amusement.

Contrary to appearance, the gravelly, grayish soil of the area is extremely fertile, loaded with minerals. When composted with pigeon droppings, it is exactly what grapes, apricots, and squash delight in. Throughout the cone-studded valleys of Cappadocia, farmers have for centuries attracted pigeons by gouging dovescotes into the cliff walls. Guano is still spread in the vineyards, producing lush vines that crawl along the ground. In September they were weighed down with grapes. Even along the sandy back alley where we slept in the cozy cave rooms, above the town of

Urgüp, everyone seemed to tend a tiny plot of tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and grapes.

Several times during my heavy-breathing trudge up the steep hill from Urgüp's center I was invited (though I always declined) to have tea with neighbors whom I'd never met and couldn't converse with. "The usual Turkish hospitality," Vedat said with a dismissive shrug. Along the way I would unintentionally attract a lively little circus of urchins, who pranced and chanted hopefully, "Madame, bonbon, madame, bonbon." My dozen-word vocabulary of Turkish was frustratingly inadequate for these encounters.

FROM Cappadocia our path turned west to follow ancient routes over which, 800 years ago, silk and spice traders bore their wares from caravansary to caravansary. These free hospitality centers, financed by the ruling sultan, were at the disposal of all traveling merchants, thereby encouraging transcontinental commerce. I could imagine daily

life in, say, 1250 in these magnificent walled enclosures where salesmen and their families could bathe, eat, sleep, and have their boots mended in safety. If your camel ailed, there was an in-house vet. A resident accountant could balance your books. The goal was to keep the economic river flowing—sell a carpet, buy some henna.

A number of caravansaries today lie in sorry heaps along the main highway from Aksaray to Konya, many of the stones and columns having been carted away to build a mosque or a farmer's shed. Sultanhanı, however, has been magnificently restored. A guard there, the ever-present cigarette drooping from his bottom lip, ushered us through the gargantuan portal, elegantly carved with swirls, loops, and quotations from the Koran. A small mosque sits in the middle of an open courtyard lined by



Konya



Mevlana Museum



Spice merchant

stone colonnades, above which, on a second floor, travelers slept. Cargo was stored with the donkeys and camels in an adjacent stable, an echoing limestone cavern as big as an airplane hangar.

With the bloody arrival in the eleventh century of Seljuk Turks, the ferocious Islamic horsemen from central Asia, Anatolian nomads were in for some rude changes. No more floating about the great plateaus—they would plant vegetables and worship Allah. Meanwhile, the Seljuks built mosques, hospitals, and Islamic schools. Konya, the Seljuk capital, is still a conservative Muslim city; we should probably have anticipated the chilly reception we got. But one late afternoon, uncovered and alone, I ambled into the marketplace, a web of narrow alleys peppered with tiny stalls selling everything: Reeboks, priceless saffron, lawn mowers. “*Merhaba*,” I politely greeted the dried-fruit merchant, who looked disapproving. When we had finished negotiations for bags of salted chickpeas, apricots, and pistachios, he bowed ceremoniously and said in English, “Welcome to Turkey.” Civility triumphed. Or commerce, more likely.

Mevlana, the thirteenth-century poet and mystic who established the sect of the Whirling Dervishes, is buried under the Green Dome, a beautiful fluted tower of turquoise tiles in the Mevlana Museum. Everyone removes his or her shoes at the entrance and then carries them in a borrowed plastic bag; I pulled up my scarf. For many the museum, a former monastery, is a sacred shrine; for others it is a curiosity. In one of the ante-rooms a wrinkled, white-bearded man knelt on the ground over an open book. He appeared oblivious of the tourist bustle, even of the camera flash when a young man snapped his picture. Out of nowhere sprang a woman who had to be the old man’s wife, to berate the photograph-

er for his insensitivity, on and on. Her tirade didn’t need translation. And still the aged Muslim bent over his prayers, never lifting his eyes.

Our droning bus rocked us to sleep on the high, flat plateaus that grow wheat and more wheat. We woke amid apple and pomegranate orchards looking out on a thirty-mile-long lake, an endless sapphire expanse on which nothing stirred. Infused, perhaps, with natural sulfite, the water is poisonous to most kinds of life, we heard later—though certainly not from Vedat, who assured us that this was holiday heaven.

The lakeside restaurant at Eğirdir served a typically delicious Turkish meal that noon. From the *meze* table of cold hors d’oeuvres we could choose crumbly white sheep’s cheese, the pastry *börek* or fresh flat pide bread, eggplant any which way, yogurt with minced cucumber, freshly cut-up tomatoes, garlic pickles. If we wanted fish, the waiter would make the choice for us. A perch arrived whole on my plate, deep-fried, melt-in-the-

mouth moist, with a wedge of lemon. We ate sweet melon for dessert. I ruined almost every fabulous meal by finishing it with a tiny cup of unsweetened Turkish coffee. It seemed a simple matter of training the palate. But to me, that silty black sludge still tastes like warm mud with a dash of diesel fuel.

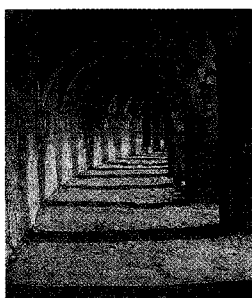
VEDAT and my tour-mates disappeared down the runway in Izmir as Bill thundered in. Our first challenge was getting through a tollbooth as we tried to head south. We were trapped between a traffic gate that wouldn’t open (the tickets had run out in the automatic dispenser) and a line of furiously honking Turks wondering why we didn’t press on. It took exhausting hand gestures to explain that everyone must back up and enter a neighboring booth. This kind of thing seems to happen all

the time in Turkey. Elevators open between floors, electricity can quit at any moment and remain off for hours (thereby also suspending all plumbing), planes are inexplicably delayed, and reservations (of whatever variety) may be canceled or reinstated quite arbitrarily. These are the growing pains, I guess, of a young nation rushing to catch up.

The new mountain roads east zigzag abruptly into impressive heights. We drove through fragrant pine groves to upland plateaus backed by craggy peaks. Rows of hundreds of beehives ribboned the steep alpine meadows. Honey of all colors, dark amber to blond, lined tables at roadside stands, only rarely tended. We stopped at one to buy dried figs and walnuts. Forget bargaining with the cheerful, round peasant woman. She smiled, rubbed my arm, insisted that I sample all her nuts, jams, and sweet vinegars. Still chattering away in a language meaningless to me, she helped herself to Turkish liras from my outheld wallet, collecting a healthy sum barely short of robbery. For just a second I missed Vedat’s protective chaperoning.

And so we wandered, past the shepherds’ black-felt tents, drifts of goats being led to a communal fountain, tattered canvas lean-tos sheltering women at their rug looms, fields where men hung on to wooden ploughs behind their donkeys. Then up ahead, sparkling in the sunlight, a new gas-station palace loomed: four lines of pumps, free car and truck wash, restaurants, a cafeteria, clean washrooms, a convenience store. As a traveler in Turkey today, you can have both ancient and updated caravan-saries, at convenient intervals along roads that have been transporting people and goods for almost too long to fathom.

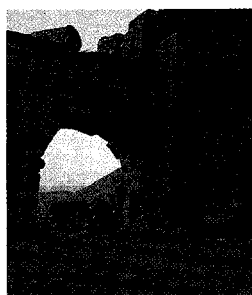
Tours are the ticket for those unprepared to go it alone. For more information on IST Cultural Tours write to the company at 225 West Thirty-fourth Street, New York, NY 10122, or call 800-833-2111. The Turkish Tourist Office (821 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017; 212-687-2194) can make other recommendations or suggest independent itineraries. The liveliest guidebook I found was Lonely Planet’s Turkey. As background reading I loved A Fez of the Heart, by Jeremy Seal; Turkish Reflections, by Mary Lee Settle; Alexander’s Path, by Freya Stark; and The Towers of Trebizond, a novel by Rose Macaulay. ☼



Roman theater



Fruit seller

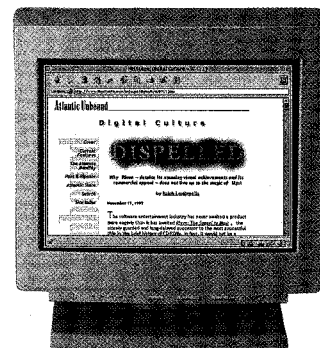
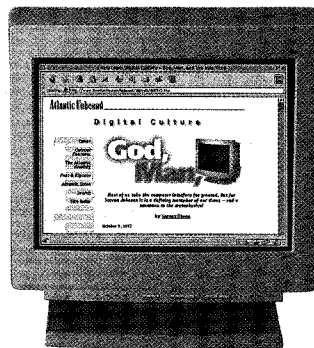


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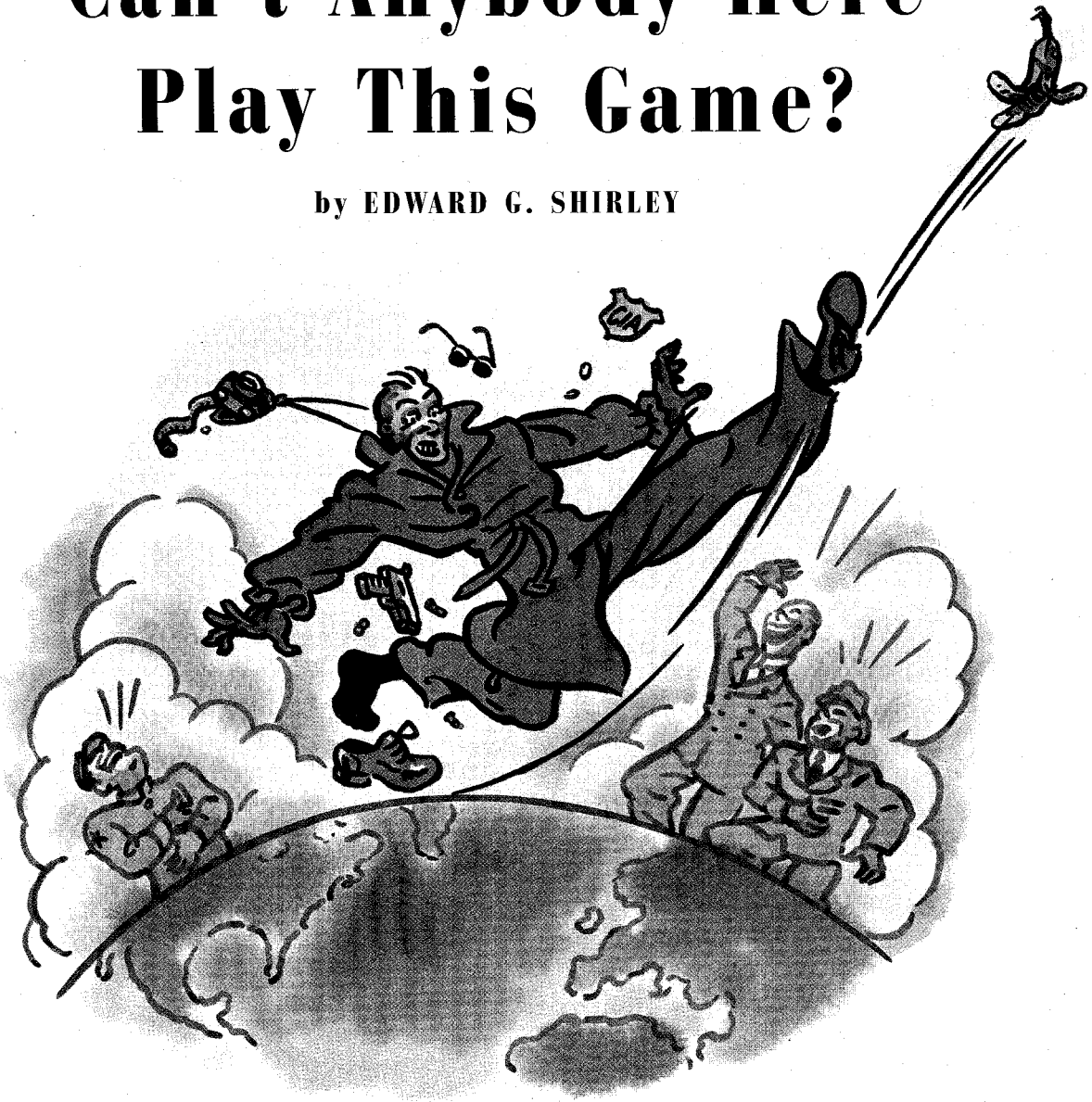
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Can't Anybody Here Play This Game?

by EDWARD G. SHIRLEY



The sensational revelations of recent years about the Central Intelligence Agency almost obscure a larger point: the Agency is just no good at what it's supposed to be doing. So writes the author, a former CIA officer, who describes a corrosive culture in which promotion-hungry operatives collect pointless intelligence from worthless foreign agents. Reform, the author warns, may prove impossible

THE arrest of Aldrich Hazen Ames, a CIA operative turned KGB mole, in February of 1994, fundamentally changed the public perception of the clandestine service of the Central Intelligence Agency. Before Ames only "case officers," operatives who recruit and run foreign agents, knew how dysfunctional the service had become. Since Ames the outside world has learned that much is rotten in the Directorate of Opera-

tions—the official name of the clandestine service, known to insiders simply as the DO. Yet the senators and congressmen who oversee the DO, the journalists who report on it, and the civilian directors who run it have failed to understand and to confront the service's real problems. Even among CIA analysts who work in the Directorate of Intelligence, the overt, think-tank side of the house, few have grasped the extent of the DO's decrepitude.

Politically charged, usually lurid stories of CIA misconduct have deflected attention from telling questions about U.S. intelligence. Journalists level charges of Agency involvement in Latino drug-smuggling rings. The American wife of a Central American guerrilla accuses the DO of complicity in torture and murder. Female case officers sue their male bosses for sexual discrimination.

All these affairs have blackened the Agency's image. None advances the debate on whether the clandestine service actually spies well. Protected by secrecy, by a disciplined and obedient bureaucracy, and by the average outsider's basic ignorance of and fascination with espionage, the leadership of the DO has pre-empted and stalled pressure for Agency reform.

In 1985 I joined the Directorate of Operations. A devout cold warrior, I had no qualms about espionage or covert action against the Soviet Union and in defense of America's national interests. I was proud and eager when the Near East Division chose me to join its ranks. I had dreamed for years of applying my academic training in Islamic history to the DO's Middle Eastern mission.

Twelve years later I retain an appreciation for espionage—for those rare moments when a case officer contributes to his nation's defense. But I have long since lost my pride in the DO, which has evolved into a sorry blend of Monty Python and Big Brother. I resigned in 1993.

When current and former case officers gather, their conversations inevitably converge: they wonder whether the DO has irretrievably fallen apart. A few years ago I asked a former colleague who had served in Moscow whether she had ever successfully explained the DO's problems to an outsider. "No, never," she replied. "I've given up trying. You have to explain so much you get lost in the details, or you just sound like a whiny, unpatriotic left-winger."

The CIA, with a certain fanfare, recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The Agency wants the American public, and especially Congress, to believe that its men and women won the Cold War, along the way had a few problems, and yet are now rising to the challenges of the twenty-first century. In front of the intelligence-oversight committees in Congress senior Agency officials repeat the CIA's new mission statement about battling terrorism, drugs, the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, and rogue regimes in Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and North Korea. With the Ames fiasco receding, some current and retired CIA officials are asserting that if Congress and the press would only back off, the professionals would once again get the job done.

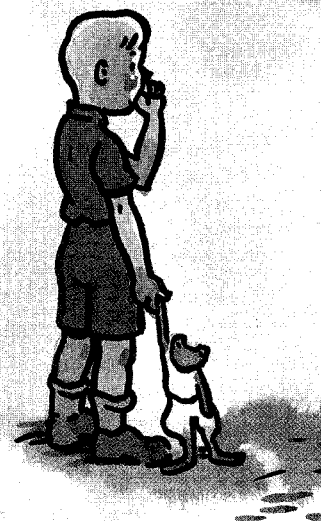
One feature of a closed society is that it lies to itself as readily as it lies to outsiders. Writing as "X" in his 1947 assessment of the Soviet Union, the diplomat George F. Kennan borrowed from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; the passage applies equally to the CIA's present-day Directorate of Operations.

From enthusiasm to imposture the step is perilous and slippery; the demon of Socrates affords a memorable instance of how a wise man may deceive himself, how a good man may deceive others, how the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud.

The sad truth about the CIA—what the Ames debacle didn't reveal—is that the DO has for years been running an espionage charade in most countries, deceiving itself and others about the value of its recruited agents and intelligence production. The ugliest DO secret is how the clandestine service encourages decent case officers, gradually and naturally, to evolve into liars about their contribution to America's security. By 1985, the year Ames volunteered to spy for the KGB, the vast majority of the CIA's foreign agents were mediocre assets at best, put on the payroll because case officers needed high recruitment numbers to get promoted. Long before the Soviet Union collapsed, recruitment and intelligence fraud—the natural product of an insular spy world—had stripped the DO of its integrity and its competence.

Younger operatives are resigning in droves, because they have given up hope of reform. The attrition was sufficient to provoke an investigation by the inspector general in 1996.

Though the inspector general's office did a poor job of questioning young case officers who had resigned, the final report doesn't deny the increasing resignation rate among the best and the brightest who entered the DO during the Reagan years. Nearly three quarters of the case officers from my 1985 junior-officer class have quit the service. When my class entered, we were told that the DO had the lowest attrition rate—under five percent—in the U.S. government. Though this figure was no doubt inaccurate—a normal and healthy rate of attrition in any bureaucracy should be higher—it does reflect the DO's



credo that officers don't quit the clandestine service unless *they* are flawed. Within the DO and in front of Congress senior officials downplay the rising resignation rate and even deny that the directorate's younger officers—let alone its best ones—are abandoning ship.

But the senior officers themselves know the truth. As early as 1988 a senior CIA official responsible for the Directorate of Operations' budget and personnel visited stations and bases worldwide, discreetly asking young case officers why so many good young officers were quitting. The official wanted to know whether junior officers would be willing to participate in a round-table discussion with the deputy director of operations, the boss of the clandestine service. The senior official, not a case officer herself, didn't realize that she was asking case officers to commit professional suicide. The round-table discussion never took place.

A Dysfunctional Family

AMERICANS were shocked by the DO's nine-year failure to catch Ames, a hard-drinking, free-spending KGB mole inside the Soviet-East Europe Division. How could the DO have entrusted its premier agents—probably the best Soviet agents the CIA ever had—to a counter-intelligence case officer with such evident flaws? Unlike the usual agent chaff that case officers recruit in order to get promotions, these Soviet agents were the real thing. Treason and his spending habits aside, the truth is that Ames was not



much different from many of his peers. He was disgruntled and he drank too much. He disliked recruiting foreign agents and he did it poorly. He distrusted most of his colleagues, particularly those more senior. He was stalled in his career as a mid-level officer (a GS-14), slightly higher in grade than the average retiring case officer.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union moving in the cocktail-party circuit was the primary, often the only, way a case officer could rub shoulders with Communist “hard targets”—foreigners who were extremely difficult to approach, let alone develop and recruit. In seeking to press the flesh, many officers drank too much. More important, many case officers—and Ames was one of them—chafed at the recruitment game, the desperate socializing in search of a foreigner who could be written up as a promising “developmental.” Case officers grow cynical in such a world—and they’ve been living in one since the 1960s. Before he volunteered his services to the Soviets, Ames amused himself in Mexico City by privately critiquing the station’s case officers and their numerous recruited agents, who produced very little intelligence. Contrary to the common, outsider view of him, Ames was attentive to both operational details and intelligence reports. He discovered before most of his peers did that one of the most renowned case officers working in the Latin American division was a corrupt fraud, who inflated or invented most of his agents and probably pocketed some agents’ pay in diamonds. Though dismissed from the service, the case officer was never jailed. On his spacious balcony in a high-rise above Mexico City, Ames often passed evenings with friends wryly belittling the DO’s contributions to America’s defense.

Deeply troubled and venal, Ames slipped across that space between dissent and treason, believing it was all a charade. Given his free-spending ways, the Agency should of course have found him sooner. But spotting Ames psychologically, or by questioning his peers, would have been very difficult. In the CIA family there are many dysfunctional members.

Peeling away the layers of the Agency’s mystique—by learning how to read agents’ files, acquiring familiarity with operational details, gaining access to “restricted-handling” cases—can take years. One thing, however, did not take me

long to learn: there was a severe discrepancy between the reputations of most senior officers and their talents. Sterling exceptions aside, the average senior officer rose through the hierarchy without ever learning much about the language, culture, or politics of the countries in which he served. The good case officers in my junior-officer class hunted vainly for mentors like Richard Helms, Paul Henze, and Robert

Ames—renowned case officers from the past who knew their languages and their countries well.

Not a single Iran-desk chief during the eight years that I worked on Iran could speak or read Persian. Not a single Near East Division chief knew Arabic, Persian, or Turkish, and only one could get along even in French. One Near East officer, sent during the Iran-contra affair to assess and debrief Manucher Ghorbanifar, the slick and savvy Iranian middleman between the Ayatollah Khomeini’s regime and the Americans and Israelis, spoke no Persian and had no background in the Middle East. He repeatedly had to ask Ghorbanifar to spell the names of well-known senior Iranian officials.

At the Agency’s espionage-training school (“The Farm”) at Camp Peary, near Williamsburg, Virginia, instructors regularly told trainees that cultural distinctions did not matter, that an operation was an operation regardless of the target. Whether Arab, German, Turkish, Brazilian, Persian, Russian, Pakistani, or French, targets were (as Duane Clarridge, a Europe Division and counterterrorism-center chief, baldly put it) “all the same.” “An op is an op,” a favorite mantra of English-only case officers, is one of the DO’s most self-defeating conceits.

Of all the clandestine service’s Cold War missions, no task was more mystique-building, but at the same time more illusory, than the recruiting of Soviet agents. The No. 1 operational directive of every case officer was to recruit KGB officials, Soviet military-intelligence officers, and Soviet diplomats, but this essentially amounted to little more than paper-shuffling between CIA headquarters, in Langley, Virginia, and case officers in the field. Real recruitment was more often than not a sheer fluke. According to Soviet-East Europe Division officers, the best agents Ames killed were all “walk-ins,” who had volunteered their services to the United States. Handling walk-ins is no mean feat, and CIA case officers have often handled sensitive walk-ins exceptionally well. But “recruiting” walk-ins has little to do with the protracted “recruitment cycle”—the spotting, assessing, developing, and recruiting of foreigners worldwide—on which the DO has built its budget and esprit de corps.

During the Cold War, DO managers in the field wanted young case officers to telephone, out of the blue, Soviet of-

**NOT A SINGLE
IRAN-DESK CHIEF
COULD SPEAK PERSIAN.
NOT A SINGLE NEAR EAST
DIVISION CHIEF KNEW
ARABIC, PERSIAN,
OR TURKISH.**



**FIVE SEATS. ONE STEERING WHEEL.
THIS COULD BE A PROBLEM.**

You're halfway
through the curve
and though you can
feel the G-forces
pushing, your 900 SE
holds like it's on
rails. Deeper into the
throttle, the turbo
kicks in, propelling
you into the next
corner. "Now we're
having fun," you
think. And apparently
your friends feel the
same. The decent
thing to do is give
each a turn. Yes, that
would be nice of
you. "Fat chance,"
you mutter silently.

SAAB

officials with whom they had no plausible reason to be in touch. The lucky case officers who made it past the telephoning and the awkward encounters were encouraged to socialize as intensely as possible. They were to ignore the constant advice of KGB defectors who warned that if a case officer met a Soviet citizen, he should simply say hello, offer a business card with a home telephone number, and then say good-bye. If the Soviet wanted to defect or to work in place against the Communist system, he would send a message. KGB defectors argued that the active development of Soviets would only draw the attention of Soviet counterintelligence, and would amplify a Soviet embassy's or consulate's normal paranoia. Yet the CIA persisted. The DO's mystique and pride, not to mention its jobs and budget, were at stake.

Terrible DO failures occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Not just in the Soviet Union did the CIA lose numerous agents. An organization whose motto is the verse from the Gospel of John "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" had grown sloppy, developing a lackadaisical appreciation of the distinction between fact and fiction. Some good agents, and many mediocre or worthless ones, died for their case officers' mistakes; in an environment in which poor-quality agents routinely got inflated into first-rate ones, case officers frequently put agents who really didn't know much into harm's way.

A Liars' Paradise

FROM 1947 through the early 1960s it was good to be a case officer. Almost everyone feared the Soviet Union; Communists in league with the USSR were everywhere. Except for the United States, the world was poor. More important, Washington knew very little about the postwar world for which it had reluctantly become responsible. The communications and transportation revolutions had not yet taken place. Relatively few Americans traveled abroad. Slow-moving diplomatic pouches, not arduously encrypted and decrypted cables, were the primary means of contact between Washington and the field. Diplomats and spies were often at the forefront in obtaining and analyzing information. A U.S. embassy official in Moscow could write a telegram about the Soviet soul, as Kennan did, that would actually be passed around among White House Cabinet members. What today might seem self-evident, or academic, was then exotic and classified.

The CIA sent its case officers out to gather all the information they could, and in most countries outside the Communist bloc they found the locals receptive. Enlisting the support of the Germans, the French, or the Japanese in the face of a common enemy was not Mission Impossible. An overwhelming mutual interest, not money, brought American case officers and otherwise prickly foreigners together.

Many, if not most, of the Agency's finest intelligence-producing sources were unpaid. In the first two decades of the Agency's existence, when the DO evolved out of the covert-action-oriented Office of Policy Coordination and the espionage-oriented Office of Special Operations, recruiting spies was not a head-counting game. According to one old Agency hand, "We would never have tolerated . . . bragging about lining up ducks [recruitments], as if clandestine intelligence were some kind of assembly line."

The Directorate of Operations
(or, as it was then
euphemistically
known, the



Directorate of Plans) was a clubbish group of men. Even after the huge expansion of the clandestine service, during the early 1950s (more new employees were hired then than during the Vietnam War), graduates of prestigious colleges and universities predominated. Washington's Metropolitan and Alibi Clubs perhaps had as many operational discussions within their walls as did Agency headquarters. Senior officers ranked and promoted their juniors in a highly subjective manner. This old-boy system had its problems. But racking up recruitments, good or bad, did not necessarily get an officer promoted.

In the 1950s and early 1960s the CIA's top leaders—men like Allen Dulles, Frank Wisner, Richard Bissell, Tracy Barnes, and Desmond Fitzgerald—were pro-

foundly devoted to covert action. Covert action (orchestrating coups, anti-Communist insurgencies, academic conferences, labor unions, political parties, publishing houses, and shipping companies) required considerable manpower, and it drew the intellectual crème de la crème. It compelled a higher degree of intellectual curiosity, accomplishment, and operational savoir faire than did espionage ("espionage" referring specifically to the recruitment of foreign intelligence agents). With so many talented officers working in covert action, and with most of the foreigners involved being friendly collaborators and not "recruited" assets, the DO could scarcely base promotions on the number of recruitments a case officer made each year.

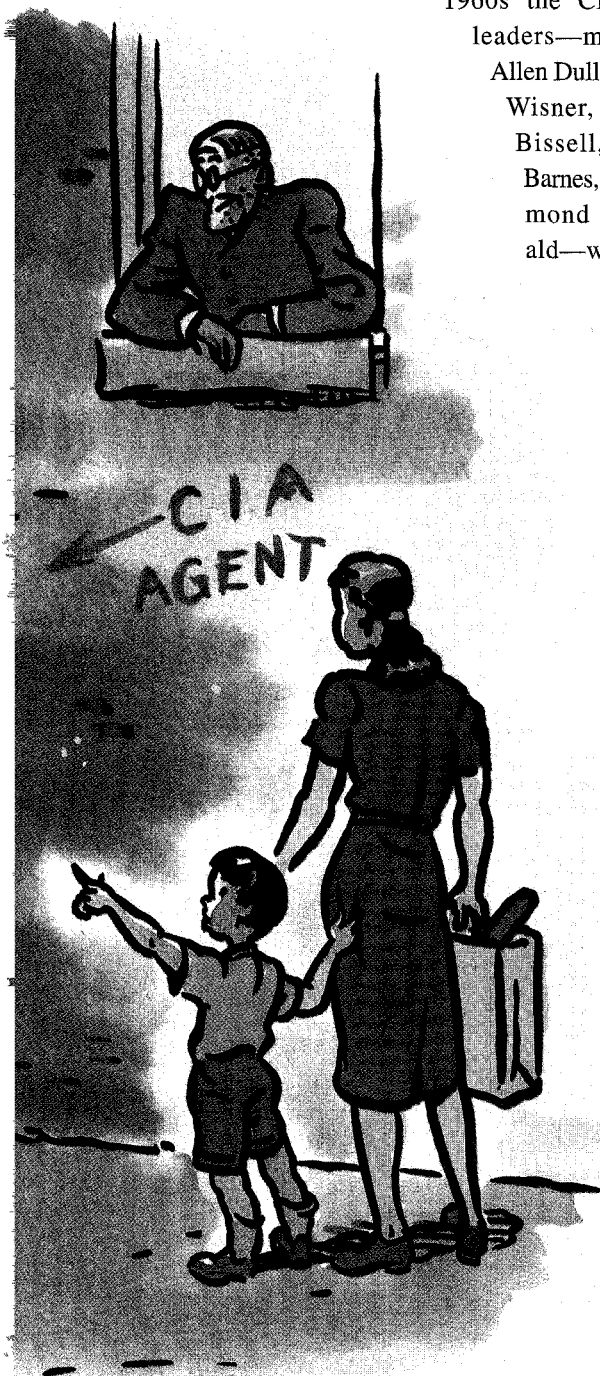
After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, covert action became politically riskier. More important, press revelations during the 1960s and 1970s about various CIA maneuvers of dubious legality and wisdom, followed by several bouts of congressional investigation, helped to sully the Agency's covert-action credentials. Though covert action continued worldwide in the 1970s, it employed less manpower. Inside the CIA working on covert action no longer had the same prestige, and was becoming a slower track for promotions.

By the time Stansfield Turner became Jimmy Carter's director of central intelligence, in 1977, the decades-old tug-of-war inside the Agency between covert action and espionage was over. Henceforth covert action would be only an avocation. Espionage was the area in which case officers could better manage their destinies.

Sometime in the late 1960s and early 1970s recruiting became the case officer's categorical imperative. The Vietnam War helped to propel the change. Before the war espionage was a cause; Vietnam turned it into a business. The CIA was in competition and collusion with the Pentagon in the acquisition and dissemination of intelligence about South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. As the war intensified, CIA chiefs in Saigon demanded a minimum of 300 intelligence reports a month from their station. Local agents of highly dubious value were continually added to the roster and the payroll in order to meet this unrealistic objective.

Confronted with an expanding war, Langley significantly enlarged the case-officer corps. Now far fewer new officers came from the nation's elite schools. The growing anti-war movement on eastern college campuses deprived the Agency of the long-cherished "P" (professor) factor in its discreet, highly successful university recruiting networks. Scandals involving domestic mail interception, wiretaps, and surveillance activities by the CIA, reported by Seymour M. Hersh in *The New York Times* in 1974, finished off CIA-university relations.

The war combined and accelerated three factors highly corrosive of the clandestine service: a surplus of easily recruited "sources"; poor quality control on intelligence re-



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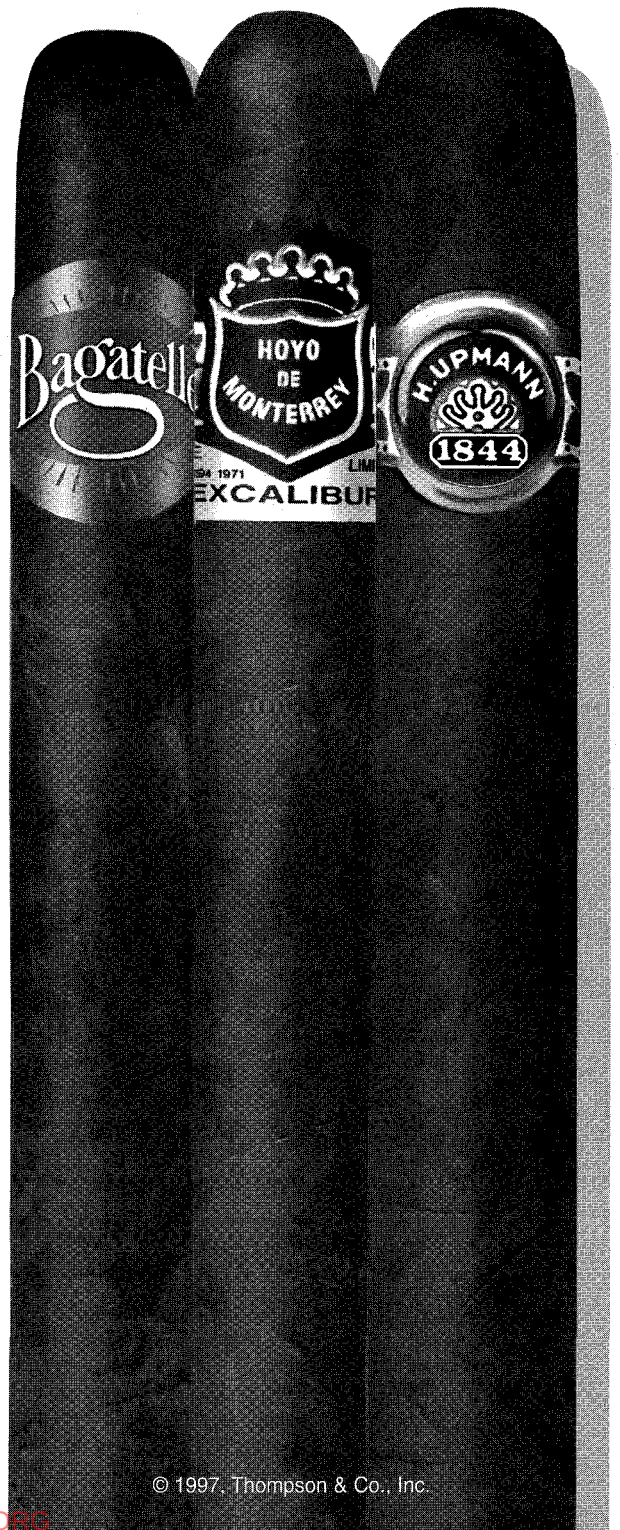
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ports; and falling admission standards for case officers. Though there were CIA operatives and analysts who realized (and steadfastly advised Washington policymakers) in the late 1960s that America's war in Vietnam was lost, Southeast Asia became, bureaucratically, a liars' paradise, where aggressive, self-promoting case officers quickly got ahead.

The Numbers Racket

AS the Soviets expanded the Cold War geographically in the 1960s and 1970s, the CIA significantly increased the size and number of its stations and bases throughout Africa and Latin America. In the Third World working for the CIA was a rite of passage for many men (Third World agents were and are almost all men). For Latin Americans, Arabs, and Africans, association with the Agency could be highly respectable and reasonably well paid. The CIA was the little guy's conduit to the cabal that ruled the world. Third World targets were usually inexpensive and relatively easy for the DO to recruit and run, and their "flap" potential was far less than that of agents operating against our sensitive First World allies.

With most of the Third World seen as a legitimate Cold War arena, case officers worldwide could go after local diplomatic or military representatives. Even if the CIA was not in fact interested in recruiting a given official of a given Third World country (admittedly, a rare circumstance during the Cold War), a case officer could still chase the target and label him an "access agent," who might conceivably lead to a more promising, usually Soviet, recruit. With the entire Third World "on the screen," recruitment possibilities for the average case officer increased enormously. One of my former chiefs of station once remarked about a Soviet case, "Isn't it amusing to contemplate the hundreds—God knows—of African access agents we've recruited over the years when the Russians are among the world's worst racists?" All told, the CIA recruited thousands of people from the Third World.

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, with its enthusiasm for "objective criteria" in "performance appraisal systems," further solidified the DO's head-counting ethic. Though the act didn't technically apply to the Agency (Langley is in theory exempt from civil-service regulations), in spirit it did. The business-school philosophy of "management by objective" officially became de rigueur throughout the DO. (The current harassment problems of the IRS probably also stem from this quantitative philosophy run amok.)

As the CIA got larger, bureaucratic standards were for-

malized. The power of DO promotion panels eclipsed the old patronage system. The organization needed a common criterion for "objectively" judging the case-officer corps. To a considerable extent the American ethic of judging all people equally and the American fondness for translating merit into numbers gave rise to the practice of agent head-counting on case-officer evaluations.

To most people at the time, the annual head count—how many agents have you recruited?—seemed an efficient, progressive idea. Quickly, however, a rather raw reckoning of numbers took hold. By the early 1980s Africa, Near East, and Latin America Division case officers dominated the DO because recruitments in their regions were relatively easy. By the time I entered the service, senior officers regularly counseled young Soviet and Europe Division case officers to have at least one "recruitment tour" in Africa or the Middle East

early in their careers, in order to avoid being forgotten by the promotion

panels. At The Farm senior

Africa Division officers

tried to enlist trainees

by bragging that

operatives in their

division racked

up more recruit-

ments, and thus

were promoted

more quickly, than

those in any other

division. Not once

did I meet a senior

Africa Division offi-

cer who extolled the

quality of the intelligence

reports produced by the divi-

sion's vast roster of agents.

Overseas in the 1980s and 1990s my junior-officer class encountered DO managers offering \$3,000 bonuses for "scalps" provided by Christmas or Easter. Bottles of champagne were awarded to case officers who generated the most intelligence reports. The winners usually scored twenty or thirty reports a month. In 1989 many of my colleagues were stunned to receive a cable from a division chief who had spent his career chasing Soviets. He recommended one "high quality" recruitment *per year* for each case officer in his division. This cable came on the heels of a worldwide headquarters cable announcing that *all* our Cuban agents had probably been double agents. The competition realized long ago how desperate America's case officers are for scalps. They have been happy to provide them.

In 1993 CIA Director James Woolsey sent a cable to all stations and bases encouraging case officers and their managers to push for quality, not quantity, in their recruitments

THE CIA'S
CLANDESTINE
SERVICE ENCOURAGES
DECENT CASE OFFICERS,
GRADUALLY AND
NATURALLY, TO EVOLVE
INTO LIARS.



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in the forest,
does anyone hear it?**

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and intelligence production. To an extent Woolsey knew that there was a recruitment problem in the DO. That same year, however, the DO issued new performance-evaluation guidelines for young case officers, who are responsible for the vast majority of all DO recruitments, re-emphasizing the centrality of recruitments in the promotion process. Officers in the field didn't have to read between the lines: the numbers game continued. Woolsey never knew that the DO had betrayed his good intentions.

By the time I resigned, in 1993, the DO had introduced the "Asset Validation System" for assessing foreign recruits. The DO billed the AVS as a means to prevent the recruitment and running of double agents and tired Cold War leftovers. The AVS did not officially attempt to root out "cheap recruitments." However, in the early 1990s a number of scandals in which star case officers were caught fabricating agents and intelligence reports gave reform-minded case officers hope that the DO might finally rein in the promotion-by-recruitment system. We all knew that these aggressive officers had merely pushed ac-

cepted standards of exaggeration and deceit a little too far.

This hope has proved naive. Although some senior officers will now quietly admit that there has been a numbers game, they usually complain that the 1980s generation of case officers gave rise to the problem, which they and the AVS are now solving. However, the AVS—dubbed "agent scrubbing" by *The Washington Post* and often credited as a reform initiated by John Deutch (in fact William Webster began the program; Robert Gates and James Woolsey significantly expanded it)—has not really affected the recruitment game. Case officers must now write a few more cables for each recruitment—a little extra paperwork in order to gain a seal of approval. Officers can even avoid doing the paperwork altogether: in the ever-growing paper flow between headquarters and the field, AVS requirements can easily disappear for years



into a bureaucratic black hole. The recruitment of mediocre, if not entirely worthless, access agents continues.

Case officers have learned that they can recruit a worthless agent and later have the agent scrubbed without damage to their careers. Close questioning of recruitments in the DO remains uncommon. A case officer can recruit eight assets in Geneva, move on to his next tour in Paris, have all eight Geneva-based agents scrubbed, and still receive glowing evaluations from the Paris chief of station.

The AVS also does nothing to verify the value of information from the foreign agents who produce clandestine intelligence and who are the *raison d'être* of espionage. Standards for judging a source's intelligence production are so low that a case officer can easily believe, or pretend to believe, that the most routine contact is a first-rate "intel" developmental. With "forward-leaning" (that is, optimistic) cable traffic papering his way, an ambitious case officer can turn a friendly low-level telephone-company official into a sensitive penetration of a foreign nation's telecommunications industry. Once headquarters certifies a developmental's intelligence reports, the case officer knows that the developmental's recruitment will probably be approved.

Clever case officers can also easily "push" the facts and opinions available in open-source news, or mirror classified State Department telegrams, to make a developmental or an agent seem like an adequate intelligence producer. Pushing the news and mirroring

State have, regrettably, become second nature inside the DO, particularly among aggressive offi-

cers who know the system. And once poor intelligence becomes acceptable, the rule of the lowest common denominator takes hold, and cheap intel and agents inevitably become the standard.

The Agency knows that DO soft reporting on State Department issues often draws the ire of U.S. diplomats. Foreign Service officers who have access to clandestine-intelligence reports have long known that the CIA is poaching on their terrain. And as any Agency analyst will admit, the State Department and overseas representatives of the U.S. Treasury have generally provided the finest official commentary on politics and economics. Clandestine information from paid agents is by no means inherently superior to information from unpaid sources, as outsiders usually presume. Whether the subject is NATO expansion, democracy in Russia, Toulouse's Airbus versus Seattle's Boeing, the U.S. trade embargo against Iran, or the future course of South Africa, Kazakhstan, or Croatia, it has been diplomats and their contacts—not case officers and their agents—who have usually proved to be the U.S. government's most knowledgeable sources. But State reporting is not, like Agency reporting, appetizingly packaged in bite-size morsels. Diplomatic telegrams do not benefit from the boldly printed, highly classified code words that adorn Agency products. Bureaucratically inept, politically timid, and cash-starved, the State Department has rarely tried to take on Langley—a rich and tough bureaucratic power—for the DO's recruitment antics and shoddy reporting.

When I was in the service, I regularly encountered DO bosses who encouraged their case officers to put information gained from State cover work into CIA intelligence channels. When they couldn't duplicate State sources, case officers tried to borrow or to steal them, thereby putting U.S. diplomats in the awkward position of having to explain to their foreign counterparts why the U.S. government sometimes sends two "diplomats" asking the same questions.

Though case officers deserve most of the blame for debasing American espionage, they could not have done it alone. Analysts in the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, who are the primary consumers and judges of foreign-intelligence reporting, share the responsibility. Like case officers, the analysts generally don't have the necessary languages, academic preparation, or in-country experience in their areas of supposed expertise. Ever since Robert Gates, as deputy director of intelligence, reorganized the Directorate of Intelligence in the early 1980s, it has been rare for an analyst to spend more than a few years working on one country. Promotions, especially promotions to managerial grades, come more quickly to generalists who have covered several areas. Sitting in six-by-six, usually windowless, cubicles, and confronted daily with demands for short-order "finished" intelligence, analysts rarely have the desire to sacrifice their careers by slowly building the skills that give uncommon insight into foreign countries.



Too Many Spooks— Too Few Spies

AGENT scrubbing has not yet advanced an answer to the question that has bedeviled the Directorate of Operations: How do you rank and promote the entire cadre of DO case officers when valuable recruitments are so few in number and so difficult to obtain? The exact number of case officers is classified, but U.S. press reports of approximately 2,000 are not far off the mark. In some U.S. embassies and consulates CIA case officers outnumber diplomats who report on political and economic affairs. The number of developmentals and agents necessary to keep junior and mid-level case officers busy is large: demand creates supply.

An honest discussion of recruitments, intelligence production, and promotions would cast doubt on Agency operations and careers since at least the 1970s. The DO's future, or at least its staffing levels and current management, would also be called into question. And case officers would have to confess to themselves and to Congress that the chances of success in agent recruitment today are even worse than they were in the past.

The much trumpeted challenges of the twenty-first century, unlike those of the Cold War era, are not worldwide struggles that define, galvanize, and divide nations. The Chinese may well become a serious menace, but they are not inspiring or funding radical anti-Western guerrilla movements and political parties in the Third World. China and the rogue states—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, North Korea—have embassies and consulates worldwide, offering the DO, in theory, numerous targets, but the CIA has had little success in recruiting these countries' diplomats and intelligence officers. With rare exceptions, intelligence coups against rogue states, terrorists, and the Chinese come from volunteers.

Only a handful of people in Paris, Bonn, or New Delhi have, for example, exploitable access to resident Iranian officials and scientists; the odds that a case officer could locate, let alone recruit, an Iranian source are poor. Just meeting an interesting Iranian without the host country's assistance or knowledge is extremely difficult. If the French, the Germans, or the Indians were to become hostile to U.S. espionage operations, CIA case officers would have only a remote chance of doing anything worthwhile. And with the Soviet threat gone, Europeans have become noticeably more hostile to CIA officers operating on European soil. The Western Europeans now regularly exchange information among themselves about the CIA. The French, the Germans, and the Austrians recently fired warning shots by seeking the removal of case officers who failed to understand the new post-Cold War ground rules. National pride and differing national interests (the European Union, for instance, has consistently downplayed Iran's nefarious behavior in order to maintain commercial ties with Iran) have severe-

ly restricted Agency operations in Europe and elsewhere.

Current DO operations against America's toughest Middle Eastern foes—Iran and Iraq—have essentially devolved into "cold pitches," in which case officers with little biographical or psychological information on their targets, whom in many cases they have never even met before, "pitch" a clandestine relationship with the CIA in exchange for money. This approach can occasionally work, but it is neither a particularly clever nor a thoughtful way to get foreigners to risk their lives for the United States. When the approach does work, however, such quick hits read well on case-officer performance evaluations.

Glasnost?

SPYING is the second-oldest profession. Irrespective of Langley's incompetence, or American doubts about covert action, spying in some form will continue. The intelligence debate is not about whether we should spy but about how we can spy well. If Washington could find reliable sources of information on Iran's Ministry of Intelligence, local Shi'ite opposition in the oil-rich regions of Saudi Arabia, or Communist China's military general staff, America would be safer for the effort. All these "human intelligence" targets are extraordinarily difficult to reach, but if the DO were an organization with long-range plans and talented personnel, it might have a chance.

The window of opportunity for reform that was inadvertently opened by the Ames case is now closing. In Washington, where elected and appointed officials remonstrate with the CIA's functionaries but rarely fire them, the DO's senior officers suspect that if they take a few blows, make a few cosmetic reforms, and hang tight, they will outlast their critics. Not a single senior officer was fired for the Ames debacle. No one was fired for any of the strictly operational flaps and fiascos of the past ten years (case officers dismissed because of the highly politicized Iran-contra and Guatemalan human-rights affairs don't count). Some of the perpetrators have ended up with senior-service promotions and distinguished-intelligence medals.

Reforming the CIA is a herculean task. The unforgiving law of bureaucratic rot—first-rate people usually associate with and advance other first-rate people, but second choose third, and third choose fourth—has come brutally into play in the CIA's closed society. First-rate people are now few and far between. How does one reform an institution in which the guiding 10 percent are arguably the institution's most disingenuous, least qualified officials? How does a director of central intelligence who comes from outside the CIA look down from his seventh-floor perch and separate capable people from the incompetent? No outsider, no matter how savvy, can navigate successfully inside the DO without case officers to guide him.

"When I was in high school, my physics teacher—whose name was Mr. Bader—called me down one day after physics class and said, 'You look bored; I want to tell you something interesting.' Then he told me something which I found absolutely fascinating, and have, since then, always found fascinating."

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Closed societies are by definition impervious to most forms of outside discipline and oversight, and an espionage service must to a large and unhealthy extent be a closed society. First-rate or third, case officers and agents must be camouflaged and protected.

Outsiders cannot save the Directorate of Operations from itself unless they hold it accountable for all its failures and deficiencies. The junior and mid-level case officers who are considering leaving the organization need to see some sign that outsiders will no longer tolerate sham or bungled operations. At a minimum, the President, the CIA director, and Congress's intelligence-oversight committees must ensure that the Agency's inspector general and counterintelligence investigations are accurate and fair. The inspector general's office has often oscillated between blatant collusion with the DO and anti-DO grandstanding before Congress. And counterintelligence reports by the DO's various staffs and divisions usually fall victim to back-room machinations that keep even useless senior officers relatively unblemished and consistently unpunished.

Though inspector general and counterintelligence reports have rarely been tough on the DO, they have almost always been too tough for senior case officers to swallow. When surprisingly scathing inspector general or counterintelligence investigations do not lead to the dismissal of senior officers guilty of gross incompetence, good officers resign or fall silent.

Firing the old guard will not by itself change the culture of the clandestine service. As in any bureaucracy, senior functionaries have progeny. Even good case officers inevitably make debilitating compromises if they are working in a bad system. First-rate operatives who know they've collected little truly meaningful intelligence over the years can nevertheless idealize the Directorate of Operations, the myth and methods of clandestine intelligence becoming inseparable from their identities, honor, and family life. Only a complete overhaul of the service that would drastically reduce the number of veteran case officers has a chance of saving the clandestine service. In order to reform U.S. espionage, outsiders must use the only sure leverage they have for safely prying open the clandestine service: DO intelligence reports. The director and the intelligence-

oversight committees, or the outside experts they appoint, can review the intelligence production of selected officers, operational desks, staffs, centers, and divisions. Though a case officer may recruit a highly valuable agent who produces no intelligence reporting (for example, a code clerk at a foreign embassy), all non-covert-action recruitments are meant to lead, eventually, to intelligence production. If outside experts compare open-source, classified non-Agency, and DO information on a subject, they can find out whether the DO is lying to itself and others. This will take time and energy, of course.

With a cadre of good case officers as his eyes, ears, and hands, the CIA director might have a chance to overcome the DO's problems. He may discover, however, that the bureaucracy has irretrievably broken down. In that case he, or Congress, should consider what only a few years ago would have been unthinkable: rebuilding the clandestine service from scratch. America's national security would not be compromised by temporarily shutting down the DO. A Directorate of Operations that produces mostly mediocre intelligence and egregiously stupid coup d'état schemes against, for example, Saddam Hussein harms the United States abroad.

If the Agency were truly intent on reform, the Directorate of Operations would abolish most of its diplomat-spy positions and replace them with "non-official cover" officers,

who operate outside an embassy or consulate, usually as

businessmen or consultants. NOCs are far from the

elite of the clandestine service, and typical non-

official covers are usually weak and small-

scale, given the growing and under-

standable reluctance of U.S. businesses

to provide Langley with any help in

this regard. Nonetheless, only NOCs

and NOC-directed agent networks can

plausibly penetrate terrorist groups,

arms-merchants' networks, and sci-

entific associations, institutes, and

corporations potentially involved in

nuclear, chemical, and biological

weapons production. Unlike inside case

officers, with their flimsy diplomatic

covers, NOCs can quietly enter and exit

countries, meet foreigners, and pass through

foreign internal-security checks without setting

off alarms. Deploying mostly NOCs overseas would

also subvert the numbers game. NOCs work without diplo-

matic immunity: contemplating jail or worse, they would

more scrupulously evaluate the intelligence benefits of a

prospective espionage operation.

Senior inside officers, who have no intention of superannuating themselves and their protégés, will disparage the value of non-official cover in the DO's future, keeping NOCs an obedient sideshow. NOCs, who are locked into the closed

**NO SENIOR
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FOR THE AMES DEBACLE.
NO ONE WAS FIRED
FOR ANY OF THE FLAPS
AND FIASCOS OF
THE PAST TEN
YEARS.**

world of the clandestine service more tightly than inside of officers are, won't complain. The better NOCs, of course, have already done what most of their better diplomat-spy colleagues have done: they've resigned or retired.

If there were no entrenched bureaucracy tirelessly challenging reform, rebuilding the clandestine service would be much easier. Bringing in graduates of America's leading colleges and universities and multilingual Americans who have lived abroad—our finest pool of intelligence talent—is not an impossible task. More than any other country, the United States can draw on a multi-ethnic, polyglot society for its intelligence service. Congress in particular bears special responsibility for guaranteeing the reform of the clandestine service. It alone has the financial authority to force changes inside the DO. After the scandals of the 1970s Congress wisely chose to exercise its right under the 1947 National Security Act to oversee the CIA more closely. Unfortunately, the oversight committees have become more often Langley's sympathetic partners than its demanding judges. Trafficking in executive-branch "secrets" is habit-forming, and congressmen and their staffers aren't immune to the allure and patriotism of being players in America's covert efforts. Especially Republicans, who generally admire the Directorate of Operations for its stealthy, anti-Communist, realpolitik image, should be more parsimonious with their favor. Congress's recent decision to drop the "whistle blower" provision from the 1998 intelligence authorization bill, which would have protected Agency employees who notify Congress of CIA wrongdoing, was a serious mistake. Capitol Hill needs more and sharper eyes inside the DO, not fewer.

Last July, George Tenet, the newly confirmed CIA director, appointed Jack Downing to be the new head of the clandestine service. A good linguist, an ex-Marine, and a member of the DO's old guard, Downing is described by a case officer who worked with him as "a consensus candidate, entirely acceptable to the DO dons" who run the DO in coordination with the deputy director of operations. In his worldwide "hello" cable to the troops, Downing wrote that the DO was still suffering from serious problems and required continuing reform. His Marine Corps candor is certainly a step in the right direction, but as every case officer who has developed a foreigner knows, words are cheap—particularly when coming from senior DO officers. But Downing deserves the benefit of the doubt. Tenet and Congress's intelligence-oversight committees should ensure, however, that the doubt is reasonable and fleeting.

It would be a shameful irony if America allowed the clandestine service, which once tried so enthusiastically to fight the Cold War, to fall victim to a closed society of its own making. Good case officers, who really have been on the front lines of America's defense, deserve better: the right to be proud, once again, of their dark profession. ☸

Special Intelligence

by ROBERT D. KAPLAN

The roles of the CIA and the military may merge, in the form of "Special Forces," made up of data-analyzing urban commandos

THE United States military, for all its sex scandals, has an easy time with the media in comparison with the Central Intelligence Agency. Media criticism of the military is periodically mixed with awe, as when journalists reported the successes of the Gulf War, made heroes out of Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, and lionized bridge-construction units in Bosnia. But media criticism of the CIA is so constant and blistering that it suggests a hatred of the intelligence profession itself—or at least a feeling that spy agencies are obsolete in a post-Cold War information age. That is ironic, because the intelligence industry is sure to become even more necessary for our well-being, and therefore more powerful within government.

That was one conclusion I reached after serving briefly as a consultant to the Army's Special Forces Regiment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Special Forces are a military growth industry. The new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry H. Shelton, comes from the Special Operations Forces. In 1996 U.S. Special Forces were responsible for 2,325 missions in 167 countries involving 20,642 people—only nine per operation, on average. Words like "low-key" and "discreet" are frequently used by Special Forces members to describe what they do. Considering that the threat posed by Russian mafias and Russian nuclear terrorists is now greater than that posed by Russian tanks and infantry, the military usefulness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will depend more on the integration of Special Forces within NATO's largely conventional command than on the integration of the Czech Republic and other former Eastern-bloc states. Then there are the gas and oil pipelines soon to be built through unstable tribal lands around the Caspian Sea, which will need protection; mounting problems with drug cartels; a predicted upsurge in the kidnapping of rich and politically prominent people and their children; the increase in climatic catastrophe, now that human beings are

inhabiting flood- and earthquake-prone regions to an unprecedented extent; and worldwide rapid-fire urbanization. All these augment the importance of lean and mobile military units that conflate the traditional categories of police officers, commandos, emergency-relief specialists, diplomats, and, of course, intelligence officers.

The public will demand protection—for as few tax dollars as possible—from a whole new kind of enemy that is using technology to miniaturize and conceal explosives and communications devices. The future will thus be brutal to industrial-age armies with big tanks and jets, and kind to corporate-style forces in urban settings, which rely on both electronic and human intelligence. In recent years various spy agencies provided information that led to the capture of plutonium smugglers. In contrast, the extensive use of conventional troops to change the regime in Haiti was both costly and unpopular—despite the lack of bloodshed. The old, pre-Vietnam method for Haiti would have been to use both the intelligence service and Special Forces to ease out or topple a cruel and incompetent regime. That method might have avoided the challenge of instituting democracy, but it would have been quieter and less time-consuming—and cheaper. Although we won't often topple regimes in the future, the urge will grow to use what the Army calls "quiet professionals" to neutralize problems that the public does not consider to be of urgent national interest. An urban geographer with whom I recently spoke told me that Vancouver—a typical emerging city-state with a productive economy and its own strategic transport links—will have no particular need for either Canada or the United States. But it will require a protective shield of the kind that Washington's Special Forces and intelligence units can provide.

SPECIAL Forces activities range from backpacking around the Thai-Burmese border in a quest for information about drug smuggling to conducting surveillance for the Bosnian peacekeeping operation. Along with the usual commando skills and an emphasis on urban fighting, the subjects taught at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg include dentistry, ophthalmology, veterinary medicine, x-ray interpretation, well-digging, negotiating, and exotic languages. The aim is to create a force of men (women are not yet eligible for Special Forces) that can (this time) truly win "hearts and minds," by acting as doctors and aid workers in a Third World city or village—and also, if need be, can kill or apprehend a war criminal, a terrorist group, or another adversary. At a recent Special Forces conference I observed an auditorium full of 1990s commandos who looked markedly different from the Vietnam-era warriors who occupied the first two rows as honored guests. The Vietnam-era men, most of them in their fifties, looked thuggish: guys without necks and occasionally with tattoos, guys you would not want to meet in the dark. The rest of the auditorium resembled a group of gradu-

ate students who happened to be in excellent physical shape.

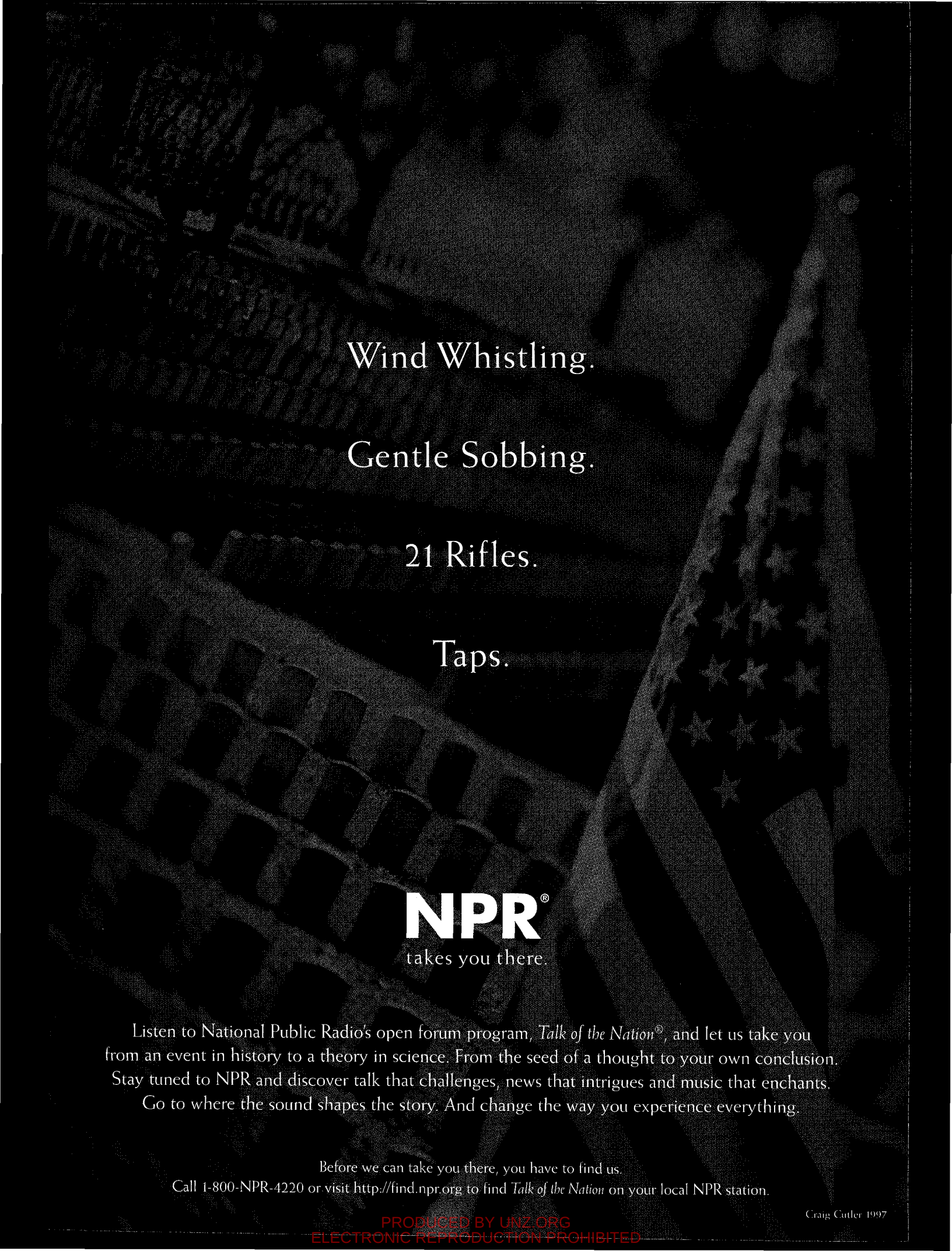
The conflation of roles is not something new and futuristic but something old and traditional. The Army is essentially re-creating colonial expeditionary forces with men who are chameleons, modeled after the spy, linguist, and master of disguise Sir Richard Francis Burton. "Ambiguity," "subjective" and "intuitive" thinking, and decisions made when only 20 percent of the evidence is in are encouraged: by the time more information is available, it will be too late to act. Nor are cultural generalizations about what Fort Bragg instructors call "modal personalities" frowned on. For instance, I sat in on a class in which the instructor, an Arabic-speaker who had lived for years in the Middle East, said that because of the authoritarian nature of Arab militaries, Arab noncommissioned officers don't make decisions on their own. He added that rote learning and an emphasis on memory mean that Arab pilots do not always use manuals for preflight checks, as U.S. pilots do.

That is stereotyping. But commandos don't have the luxury of exploring individuals. A certain amount of generalization is needed to predict how potentially hostile forces may behave. The assumption at Fort Bragg is that despite war-crimes tribunals and Geneva Conventions, future adversaries will play by the rules even less often than present ones do. Terrorism, drug smuggling, money laundering, industrial espionage, and so on will all evolve into new forms of "conventional" warfare that provide authoritarian leaders with the means to wage war without ever acknowledging it.

For an army that will have to act secretly, unconventionally, and in advance of crises rather than during them, intelligence is critical. Indeed, the growth of Special Forces might be a crude indication of the collapse of any distinction between our military and intelligence services. Yes, the CIA itself might be done away with. What the CIA does, however, will not only grow in importance but also have the support of armed troops within the same bureaucratic framework.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency is akin to the CIA—except that it has essentially its own private army. While Pakistan has grown weaker as a state, with near-anarchy prevailing in Karachi, its regional power has grown, thanks to the ISI. The Taliban religious movement in Afghanistan, for instance, in its recent sudden rise received help from the ISI, which wanted to resurrect trade routes through Afghanistan to Iran. This kind of influence may sound frightening, but it is efficient compared with what we have now.

Ever since the ancient soothsayers of the Delphic oracle there have been intelligence agencies of one sort or another. Spying is as old as war itself. Moses sent spies into Canaan. An important factor that led to Pearl Harbor was a lack of enough good intelligence. The CIA, in its current form, may eventually pass out of existence, but in a world in which borders are dissolving and bad guys conceal bombs in their pockets or steal millions by means of computers, the intelligence business is set for a golden age. ☸



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Craig Cutler 1997

LINCOLN'S AFFAIR OF HONOR

by DOUGLAS L. WILSON

In 1842 the young Abraham Lincoln was challenged to a duel by an Illinois politician whose reputation he had besmirched in print. Lincoln accepted the challenge. The author of a recent study of Lincoln's early life reconstructs this little-known affair

THERE were two things, according to Abraham Lincoln's law partner, William H. Herndon, that "Mr. Lincoln always seemed willing to forget." Both were events from his early life that, although little remembered by posterity, were sufficiently noticed in his own time to be a continuing source of pain and embarrassment to Lincoln. One was his ignominious attempt to prevent a quorum in the state legislature by leaping out a window. The other was his altercation with a man named James Shields, which led to arrangements for a duel. "During a visit which I made to the Eastern States in 1858," Herndon reported, "I was often asked for an account of the so-called duel; so often, in fact, that on my return home I told Mr. Lincoln of it. 'If all the good things I have ever done,' he said regretfully, 'are remembered as long and well as my scrape with Shields, it is plain I shall not soon be forgotten.'"

It began innocently enough, in August of 1842, with a





piece Lincoln composed for the Springfield, Illinois, Whig paper, the *Sangamo Journal*, written, he would later insist, strictly for "political effect." He had been writing anonymous and pseudonymous editorial matter and political pieces for years, and according to Herndon, "whatever he wrote or had written, went into the editorial page without question." The opportunity Lincoln responded to was a seemingly irresistible one. The Democratic state officers had been forced by the recent collapse of the state bank and the depressed value of its currency to order a refusal to accept such currency in payment of state taxes. This was seen, in the words of one commentator, as "the peak of perfidy—the State refusing to honor the currency of its own institution." Such a development was a political windfall for Lincoln and the Whigs. Never mind that the state's finances had been ravaged principally by the internal improvements system that Lincoln and his friends had helped to push through five years earlier. The ruling Democrats had been forced to take painfully unpopular steps, and the Whigs were out to make the most of it.

It fell to the state auditor, James Shields, to announce and enforce the measure. Slightly older than Lincoln, Shields was a promising and ambitious young politician in the Democratic Party. He would be appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court the following year; his wounding in the Mexican War a few years later would propel him to the U.S. Senate; and he would eventually serve as a Union general in the Civil War. But in 1842 it was his unhappy fate to inform the people of Illinois that their state's bank notes could not be used to pay their taxes.

Political observers could see the currency crisis coming. On August 19, 1842, the first of a series of "Lost Townships" letters appeared in the *Sangamo Journal*. It has all the earmarks of a newspaper editor's familiar practice of filling out his columns with something at once political and amusing. "Rebecca," the supposed author, quotes extensively from her farmer husband, Jonathan, who quotes Andrew Jackson to his neighbors. The tone is mildly political, the pace is leisurely, the English is reasonably standard, and whimsy passes for humor. The state's financial problems are discussed, but the nearest the letter comes to an indictment of state officials is this: "We heard a few days ago, by a traveller from Quincy, that the Governor was going to send instructions to collectors, not to take any thing but gold and silver for taxes." There is a persistent tradition in Lincoln biography that this series of letters was instigated by Lincoln's future wife, Mary Todd, and a friend, Julia Jayne, in order to bedevil Shields, but since the auditor is not mentioned by name in this first letter, the likelihood is virtually nil.

The second Lost Townships letter, which was written by Abraham Lincoln, is entirely different. Dated August 27, the day after Shields's announcement, it takes out after the auditor with a vengeance. What made the situation so perfect for Lincoln, who was by this time an old hand at pseudonymous

satire, was that his victim, though genial and generally well liked, was a vain and therefore vulnerable man. A native of Ireland and a staunch Democrat, Shields was a handsome bachelor who was thought to pride himself on his attractiveness to women. He was thus doubly susceptible to satiric treatment. Herndon observed, "Blind to his own defects, and very pronounced in support of every act of the Democratic party, he made himself the target for all the bitterness and ridicule of the day." Lincoln's letter gave him both barrels.

Unlike the first letter, in which Rebecca expresses herself for the most part in standard English, the second is rendered in comic dialect. Though addressed in personal terms to "Mr. Printer," much of the letter consists of a dialogue between the fictitious farmwife Rebecca and a neighbor named Jeff. After a brief introduction it describes Rebecca's call on her neighbors to inquire about their new baby.

"How are you Jeff," says I,—he sorter started when he heard me, for he hadn't seen me before. "Why," says he, "I'm mad as the devil, aunt Becca."

"What about," says I, "aint its hair the right color? None of that nonsense, Jeff—there aint an honest woman in the Lost Township than—"

"Than who?" says he, "what the mischief are you about?"

The object of Jeff's anger is, of course, not his wife's behavior but Shields's proclamation. Though basically sympathetic, Aunt Becca decides to use this occasion for some fun. "I saw Jeff was in a good tune for saying some ill-natured things, and so I tho't I would just argue a little on the contrary side, and make him rant a spell if I could."

This set the stage for the political points Lincoln wanted to score against Shields and the Democrats. The justification for refusing to accept state paper, Aunt Becca says, quoting the official announcement with a straight face, is that "*there will be danger of loss*" if it isn't done. She then points out that the only loss really at issue is the loss to the Democratic state officeholders, the issuers of the proclamation, who would have to take their salaries in depreciated state paper. It is enough to make a minister swear, Jeff says, "to have tax to pay in silver, for nothing only that [Governor] Ford may get his two thousand a year, and Shields his twenty four hundred a year, and [State Treasurer] Carpenter his sixteen hundred a year, and all without 'danger of loss' by taking it in State paper."

Lincoln deftly put in the knife by referring to a clerk in Shields's office, named Wash, who had embezzled state funds: "Wash, I 'spose, actually lost fifteen hundred dollars out of the three thousand that two of these 'officers of State' let him steal from the Treasury, by being compelled to take it in State paper." He then gave it an ingenious twist by having Jeff wonder if these state officers are going to insist that the depreciated value of the stolen state paper be made up in silver for the benefit of the thief.

Jeff concludes that Shields is lying about the situation, be-

cause he is not a true Democrat but a Whig. Calling someone a liar would ordinarily be considered fighting words, though the political context here would probably suffice to mitigate or defuse the injury. Insults were part of the game, so long as they didn't descend to the personal. But then Jeff tells Rebecca an anecdote supposedly demonstrating that Shields is a Whig and not a Democrat.

I seed him when I was down in Springfield last winter. They had a sort of a gatherin there one night, among the grandees, they called a fair. All the galls about town was there, and all the handsome widows, and married women, finickin about, trying to look like galls, tied as tight in the middle, and puffed out at both ends like bundles of fodder that hadn't been stacked yet, but wanted stackin pretty bad. And then they had tables all round the house kivered over with baby caps, and pin-cushions, and ten thousand such little nick-nacks, tryin to sell 'em to the fellows that were bowin and scrapin, and kungeerin about 'em. They wouldn't let no democrats in, for fear they'd disgust the ladies, or scare the little galls, or dirty the floor.

It is here that Lincoln's satire crossed the line. His political point had been made: Shields's proclamation was so offensive and unacceptable that loyal Democrats would conclude he must be a Whig. It was an old trick, but Lincoln's saucy dialect and animated characterization brought it to life and made it effective. That he was enjoying himself is evidenced by the racy metaphor about married women in tight clothing, which is both comic and suggestive but certainly transgressed the boundaries of propriety and good

to be in,—his very features, in the exstastic agony of his soul, spoke audibly and distinctly—"Dear girls, *it is distressing*, but I cannot marry you all. Too well I know how much you suffer; but do, *do* remember, it is not my fault that I am *so* handsome and *so* interesting."

The references to "great loss" and "State paper" are political, but the gratuitous sarcasm of "the exstastic agony of his soul" is doubly offensive. Not only personal, this passage also momentarily drops the dialect, and the satirist behind the words is clearly, if briefly, revealed.

THIS letter appeared in the *Sangamo Journal* on September 2, and Shields lost no time in sending his friend John D. Whiteside to demand that the editor reveal the name of its author. The demand was surely red-hot news among Springfield Whigs and must have quickly become the object of gossip and speculation in the circle of which Mary Todd and her friends were a part. She and Julia Jayne may well have written the Lost Townships letter that appeared the following week. In this Rebecca allows, "Why, when I found out that it was the man what Jeff seed down to the fair, that had demanded the author of my letters, threatnin to take personal satisfaction of the writer, I was so skart that I tho't I should quill-wheel right where I was." For personal satisfaction Rebecca offers in this letter to let Shields squeeze her hand (the previous letter suggested that Shields was notorious for squeezing young ladies' hands). "If this should not answer, there is one thing more that I would do rather than get a lickin"—and that is to marry Shields. "I know he's a fightin man, and would rather fight than eat; but isn't marryin better than fightin, though it does sometimes run into it?"

Shields eventually challenged Lincoln to a duel, but not before a certain amount of time had passed, a circumstance that works to cloud the chronology of this imperfectly understood affair. Knowing that a challenge would need time to be played out, Shields first went

to Quincy to attend to urgent state business. Whiteside, who would serve as his second, wrote,

An offensive article in relation to Mr. Shields appeared in the *Sangamo Journal* of the 2d of September last; and, on demanding the author, Mr. Lincoln was given up by the editor. Mr. Shields, previous to this demand, made arrangements to go to Quincy on public business; and before his return Mr. Lincoln had left for Tremont to attend the court, with the intention, as we learned, of remaining on the circuit several weeks.

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taste for that time and place. What immediately follows veers away from the political, however, and takes dead aim at the personal.

I looked in at the window, and there was this same fellow Shields floatin about on the air, without heft or earthly substance, just like a lock of cat-fur where cats had been fightin.

He was paying his money to this one and that one, and othor one, and sufferin great loss because it wasn't silver instead of State paper; and the sweet distress he seemed

Lincoln does not seem to have left Springfield until September 15, and Shields must have just missed him, for he and Whiteside took off for Tremont the next day.

The sequence of events is significant, because if Shields didn't arrive back in Springfield until September 16 and immediately left for Tremont, Whiteside probably did not have time to demand the name of the writer of the third letter. Shields no doubt merely assumed it was another of Lincoln's productions. This would account for his reference to "articles of the most personal nature" in the note he had Whiteside deliver the next day to Lincoln in Tremont.

A. Lincoln, Esq.

I regret that my absence on public business compelled me to postpone a matter of private consideration a little longer than I could have desired. It will only be necessary, however, to account for it by informing you that I have been to Quincy on business that would not admit of delay. I will now state briefly the reasons of my troubling you with this communication, the disagreeable nature of which I regret—as I had hoped to avoid any difficulty with any one in Springfield, while residing there, by endeavoring to conduct myself in such a way amongst both my political friends and opponents, as to escape the necessity of any. Whilst thus abstaining from giving provocation, I have become the object of slander, vituperation and personal abuse, which were I capable of submitting to, I would prove myself worthy of the whole of it.

Especially for modern readers, who find dueling a barbarous form of conduct inconsistent with reputable behavior, Shields's last sentence is worth noting. For someone like Shields, who considered that he carefully avoided giving offense, letting a public insult pass without notice was tantamount to acknowledging that he was cowardly—an intolerable implication. His note continued,

In two or three of the last numbers of the Sangamo Journal, articles of the most personal nature and calculated to degrade me, have made their appearance. On enquiring I was informed by the editor of that paper, through the medium of my friend, Gen. Whiteside, that you are the author of those articles. This information satisfies me that I have become by some means or other, the object of your secret hostility. I will not take the trouble of enquiring into the reason of all this, but I will take the liberty of requiring a full, positive and absolute retraction of all offensive allusions used by you in these communications, in relation to my private character and standing as a man, as an apology for the insults conveyed in them.

This may prevent consequences which no one will regret more than myself. Your ob't serv't,

Jas. Shields

Lincoln may have been put in mind of a passage from Thomas Moore's life of Lord Byron, which told of his lordship's receipt of a menacing letter from a Colonel Grenville

on the subject of what the poet had written about him in a satirical work. Byron refused to reply until the letter had been toned down, something that Moore, as his designated friend, promptly arranged with Grenville's friend. Like Byron, Lincoln saw at once that his opponent had overplayed his hand. He had assumed things that weren't true, such as Lincoln's authorship of letters written by others, and he had demanded a retraction of things for which Lincoln was not responsible. In these circumstances Shields presumably had no business speaking ominously of consequences. When Whiteside called for Lincoln's response, later in the day, he was handed the following:

Jas. Shields, Esq.

Your note of to-day was handed me by Gen. Whiteside. In that note you say you have been informed, through the medium of the editor of the Journal, that I am the author of certain articles in that paper which you deem personally abusive of you: and without stopping to enquire whether I really am the author, or to point out what is offensive in them, you demand an unqualified retraction of all that is offensive; and then proceed to hint at consequences.

Now, sir, there is in this so much assumption of facts, and so much of menace as to consequences, that I cannot submit to answer that note any farther than I have, and to add, that the consequence to which I suppose you allude, would be matter of as great regret to me as it possibly could to you. Respectfully,

A. Lincoln

Lincoln's gifts as an adversary, his ability to find and seize an advantage under pressure, are here conspicuously on display. Shields, in apparent acknowledgment of Lincoln's objections, wrote again the same evening, taking care to specify more accurately which article the editor had actually attributed to Lincoln.

A. Lincoln, Esq.

In your reply to my note of this date [September 17], you intimate that I assume facts, and menace consequences, and that you cannot submit to answer it further. As now, sir, you desire it, I will be a little more particular. The editor of the Sangamo Journal gave me to understand that you are the author of an article which appeared I think in that paper of the 2d Sept. inst, headed the Lost Townships, and signed Rebecca or Becca. I would therefore take the liberty of asking whether you are the author of said article or any other over the same signature, which has appeared in any of the late numbers of that paper. If so, I repeat my request of an absolute retraction of all offensive allusion contained therein in relation to my private character and standing. If you are not the author of any of the articles, your denial will be sufficient. I will say further, it is not my intention to menace, but to do myself justice. Your obd't serv't,

Jas. Shields

This note was not delivered to Lincoln until two days later, and although he permitted himself to read it, he then returned it, saying, according to Whiteside, that “there could be no further negotiation between them until the first note was withdrawn.” Here was a kind of chess game in which Lincoln shrewdly maintained the upper hand by careful adherence to form and by turning Shields’s demand for a retraction against him by insisting upon one of his own. Having lost time and moral momentum, Shields finally issued a challenge.

IN the class of society into which Lincoln was born, fighting was commonplace, and it could be very rough. If you hooked up with the wrong antagonist, you could easily lose an eye or an ear in what everyone considered a fair fight. More “respectable” classes may have considered this rowdy and disreputable behavior, but even they frequently offered to settle their differences by force. This usually but not always meant a fistfight; what was required was a certain readiness to defend one’s honor. Lincoln was said to have once responded to a similar challenge on the floor of the legislature. Denying that he had intended a motion as a personal reflection on his two accusers, who threatened to hold him “responsible,” he was described as saying that “he was glad he had made it; the hydra was exposed; and all the talk about settling this matter at another tribunal, he had no objection to, if gentlemen insisted on it. He was always ready, and never shrunk from responsibility.” This kind of response, which characterized Lincoln’s public demeanor, was regarded as manly and was universally admired.

In the self-consciously aristocratic class with which Lincoln was increasingly associated as he ascended the social ladder, fighting was more formal and less frequent. But the form it took—dueling—could be fatal. It would be considered extraordinary in late-twentieth-century America for anyone, particularly a public officeholder, to think he must put his life at risk over being called a liar. In the era of the Founding Fathers, as the Yale historian Joanne Freeman has shown, such, however, was frequently the case, and it continued to be well into the nineteenth century. The code of honor had very clear rules and procedures, and as Lincoln rose in society, he had more to do with people who considered themselves bound by this code. At the same time, appealing to the code was a way for someone like Shields—an aspiring, self-made immigrant—to assert his aristocratic pretensions.

Whereas the code of honor presumably established what a gentleman might or might not say about another gentleman, Lincoln seems to have operated on the basis of what he called the “set-off”—making a fair reply to something offered by someone else. Whereas the traditional code of honor put certain kinds of remarks out of bounds, Lincoln operated on the premise that one might answer in kind if provoked. The prob-

lem for Lincoln was precisely that some of his satiric thrusts at Shields had been not only personal but wholly unprovoked. He had been writing these pseudonymous pieces for years and had probably been guilty of crossing the line frequently. The Democratic paper, the *Illinois State Register*, had complained in exasperation over a similar kind of attack by an unnamed writer a few years earlier.

Our object is now to tell the editor of the Journal that he acts unfairly in licensing his unknown correspondents, to use the weapons of personal abuse against us. We are cut off from all reply in such a case. We know not the accuser and cannot reply to him. The advantage is all on his side, and if he be a man and a “gentleman,” he must know this is so.

The rule appealed to here was nonpartisan and no doubt broadly approved: personal abuse by unknown assailants was both unmanly and ungentlemanly. That is, it was discreditable to anyone presumed to be a gentleman—a status that implied not only privilege but also principled behavior. As a rising man in Springfield in 1842, Abraham Lincoln was unavoidably faced with the question of whether or not he was, or was capable of behaving as, a gentleman. Lampooning someone as sensitive about his own gentlemanly status as the egotistical James Shields was, in these circumstances, a risky venture. It meant that once found out, Lincoln would have to decide how far he was willing to carry his own gentlemanly pretensions. Like most people of the time, he was opposed to dueling, which was against the law in Illinois. But the code of honor had considerable force, and a formal challenge was no trifling matter, especially for a politician.

IF Lincoln had misgivings about accepting Shields’s challenge, they were apparently not evident to observers. He promptly named Elias Merryman as his “friend,” or second, the person designated in a formal duel to act for the principal in the necessary negotiations. Ostensibly charged with arranging many of the terms and conditions of the prospective duel, the seconds in practice usually aimed at resolving the difficulty peacefully. Merryman, who, like his counterpart, Whiteside, soon published his version of events in the Springfield newspaper, implied that he had enlisted in the affair because of his knowledge of the protocols of dueling—the infamous code duello. “I knew that Mr. Lincoln was wholly unpracticed both as to the diplomacy and weapons commonly employed in similar affairs; and I felt it my duty, as a friend, to be with him, and, so far as in my power, to prevent any advantage being taken of him as to either his honor or his life.”

At their initial meeting, in Tremont, the two seconds pledged themselves to work for a peaceful resolution of difficulties and proceeded to occupy the same buggy for part of the trip back to Springfield. But circumstances conspired

against them, and they bungled their peacemaking effort. Arriving in Springfield late Monday evening, Lincoln discovered that the prospective duel was already widely known and heard rumors of an imminent arrest. Without giving his second the opportunity to consult with Whiteside, he dictated the terms of the duel—weapons, time, and place—and made plans to flee the city the next day. Whiteside apparently planned to get Governor Thomas Ford and the powerful Democratic leader General W.L.D. Ewing to talk the un-

THE CAVALRY BROADSWORD WAS LARGE AND HEAVY;
IT WAS OFTEN DOUBLE-EDGED, AND DESIGNED
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TO WIELD IT EFFECTIVELY REQUIRED CONSIDERABLE
ARM STRENGTH AND TECHNIQUE.

governable Shields out of the duel, but before he could do so, he learned from Merryman that Lincoln had written out the terms and departed for Jacksonville. The incredulous Whiteside could neither agree to terms nor negotiate further under these conditions, nor could he consult his principal, who was still on his way back to Springfield with a lame horse. In protest Whiteside withdrew his pledge to Merryman, but he agreed to advise Shields of what had happened and to meet Lincoln's party in Alton on Thursday, the appointed day.

The terms that Lincoln had written out the night before were prefaced by instructions for Merryman as to how far Lincoln was willing to go in "adjusting" the quarrel.

In case Whitesides shall signify a wish to adjust this affair without further difficulty, let him know that if the present papers be withdrawn, & a note from Mr. Shields asking to know if I am the author of the articles of which he complains, and asking that I shall make him gentlemanly satisfaction, if I am the author, and this without menace, or dictation as to what that satisfaction shall be, a pledge is made, that the following answer shall be given—

"I did write the 'Lost Township' letter which appeared in the Journal of the 2nd. Inst. but had no participation, in any form, in any other article alluding to you. I wrote that, wholly for political effect. I had no intention of injuring your personal or private character or standing as a man or a gentleman; and I did not then think, and do not now think that that article, could produce or has produced that effect against you, and had I anticipated such an effect I would have forbore to write it. And I will add, that your conduct towards me, so far as I knew, had always been gentlemanly; and that I had no personal pique against you, and no cause for any."

When Merryman suggested this approach at their meeting, Whiteside reportedly told him that "it was useless to talk of an adjustment, if it could only be effected by the withdrawal of Mr. Shields' paper, for such withdrawal Mr. Shields would never consent to."

Because they took circuitous routes—Lincoln's party by way of Jacksonville to procure weapons, Shields's by way of Hillsborough to pick up General Ewing—both parties had to travel hard to make it to Alton by Thursday. Lincoln

was now assisted by three friends: Merryman, William Butler, and Albert T. Bledsoe; Shields was assisted by Whiteside, Thomas M. Hope, and Ewing. The parties, accompanied by what was described in the Alton newspaper as "large numbers of our fellow-citizens," proceeded to an island in the Mississippi River that was part of the state of Missouri.

Once on the ground, with no adjustment in sight, Lincoln's terms came into play.

1st. Weapons—Cavalry broad swords of the largest size, precisely equal in all respects—and such as now used by the cavalry company at Jacksonville.

2nd. Position—A plank ten feet long, & from nine to twelve inches broad to be firmly fixed on edge, on the ground, as the line between us which neither is to pass his foot over upon forfeit of his life. Next a line drawn on the ground on either side of said plank & parallel with it, each at the distance of the whole length of the sword and three feet additional from the plank; and the passing of his own such line by either party during the fight shall be deemed a surrender of the contest.

Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the truth of the observation of a contemporary authority on dueling that the challenged party—in having the selection of the place, distance, time, and weapons—"has thus, by a choice designed to be least dangerous to himself, and most hazardous to his opponent, possessed an advantage."

Shields was a man of ordinary size, and although he had had military training and was no stranger to the sword, he was under these terms seriously outclassed. The cavalry broadsword was large and heavy; it was often double-edged, and designed not for artful swordplay but for slashing. To wield it effectively required considerable arm strength and technique. Lincoln later admitted that he had been practicing with the broadsword, but his terms favored him even further: the battleground was restricted to two enclosed rectangular spaces, and because the combatants could not leave their spaces, the advantage went, all else being equal, to the

man with the greatest reach. Not only was Abraham Lincoln abnormally tall but he had disproportionately long arms.

It is tempting to see Lincoln's sense of humor at work in these specifications, especially in the blatant manner in which they work to his advantage, and in the penalties for overstepping the boundaries: death for passing over the plank and "surrender of the contest" for transgressing the back line, as if a duel could be decided by a foot fault. But the humor here is more likely a function of hindsight. All indications are that Lincoln took his situation seriously and crafted his terms deliberately as a means of avoiding defeat. His fellow attorney Usher Linder said that he asked Lincoln soon after the incident why he had selected broadswords, and Lincoln replied, "To tell you the truth, Linder, I did not want to kill Shields, and felt sure that I could disarm him, having had about a month to learn the broadsword exercise; and furthermore, I didn't want the d___d fellow to kill me, which I rather think he would have done if we had selected pistols."

Although most affairs of honor were settled long before reaching the dueling field, Lincoln and Shields were both clearly determined to see this one through. Merryman reported that when he had first arrived in Tremont, he'd asked Lincoln what he proposed to do. "He stated that he was wholly opposed to duelling, and would do anything to avoid it that might not degrade him in the estimation of himself and friends; but, if such degradation or a fight were the only alternatives, he would fight." But Lincoln was willing to have the quarrel "adjusted," whereas Shields, as his friends soon discovered, was not.

John J. Hardin, a leading Whig, was one of those who hurried to the scene to help effect a reconciliation and, in partnership with Revill W. English, a Democrat, offered to submit the case to impartial judges. To this end they drafted a formal note to Merryman and Whiteside that concluded, "Let the whole difficulty be submitted to four or more gentlemen, to be selected by ourselves, who shall consider the affair, and report thereupon for your consideration." Though this plan was ultimately not followed, it produced some progress, and Shields's friends, without his knowledge, eventually declared his offending note withdrawn. At this, by prior agreement, Lincoln's friends conveyed their principal's admission that he did write the September 2 letter "solely for political effect" and his denial that he intended to injure "the personal or private character or standing of Mr. Shields as a gentleman or a man." With this, support for Shields apparently collapsed. According to Whiteside, "This was all done without the knowledge or consent of Mr. Shields, and he refused to accede to it, until Dr. Hope, General Ewing, and myself declared the apology sufficient, and that we could not sustain him in going further." This ended the duel, for although Shields still wanted to fight, his friends had effectively declared it un-

necessary. His honor, in other words, was no longer in need of vindication.

Shields was not the only one who hoped for a more dramatic conclusion to this contest. It is apparent from several indications that William Butler was deeply disappointed in the outcome. At the beginning of the affair he had driven his buggy all night with Merryman to get to Tremont before Shields and Whiteside and warn Lincoln, pointedly bringing along a pair of dueling pistols. His eagerness to have a fight is shown by the suggestion he made to Lincoln for the trip from Tremont back to Springfield: "You ride in the buggy with Whitesides, and I will get into the buggy with Shields, and I will propose to Shields that we all stop in the prairie on our way down and 'settle the matter' (i.e. have the duel then and there.)." When a fight was finally in prospect, he regarded the efforts to stop it as rank interference. Years later he told Lincoln's presidential secretary John G. Nicolay, "All hands went down there, crossed over to the island, cleared a spot of ground, set up the boards and the duel was about to proceed, when Hardin and English interfered and stopped it." Nicolay's notes continue,

Butler says he does not know how the matter was arranged—that he had become disgusted with the whole proceeding and was sitting on a log about thirty feet away expecting to see a bloody fight, when much to his astonishment the whole affair came to an end—the seconds suddenly stepping between the combatants and taking their swords from them.

THUS ended Lincoln's one and only affair of honor. To modern readers, it has all the trappings of comic opera, but we miss an important point if we do not recognize that the combatants were in deadly earnest, that they were willing to risk their lives for something presumably more important: their honor. It is clear from the example of Shields and his friends that honor in this sense was something that went beyond personal integrity or self-respect. It crucially involved and was largely determined by the expectations of one's friends. Particularly for politicians, who depended for their viability on their supporters, honor in this sense was indispensable.

Although Lincoln came out of the affair with his honor intact, it remained for him a "scrape," an episode that, as Herdon said, he was always "willing to forget." Such was his aversion to being reminded of it that while he was President, he counseled an unsuspecting visitor to refrain from asking about the duel if he wished to remain the President's friend. Characteristically, Lincoln seemed to bear no malice toward Shields, whose political career continued without a hitch; before it was finished, reportedly, he had become the only person ever to be elected to the U.S. Senate from three different states. But if he is remembered at all, it is as the man who challenged the young Abraham Lincoln to a duel. ☼

All Things, All at Once

by LEE K. ABBOTT

SHE was Betty Porter, a being as much of magic as of muscle, and I who I ever am—Heath “Pokey” Howell, banker, commissioner of Luna County, New Mexico, and, as events will prove, the dimmest of sinners, male type. We’d known each other, yes, as acquaintances in this commodious desert, she a wid-

ow and I a recently estranged husband, and then, at the Valentine’s Dance at the Mimbres Valley Country Club not so very long ago, we shed the selves ordinary folks had said howdy to and, fumbling fiercely at each other, we took up the private half of lived life.

Our moment was as quick as heat lightning, wicked and unpredicted—as odd, I’d say, as ninety nights on Mercury. I had taken a break from the boogaloo, or whatever it was that Uncle Roy and his Red Creek Wranglers were hollering at us, and made for the door to the men’s locker. I was hunting quiet, plus at least one damp towel for my face. Betty Porter was apparently anxious for much the same, and so we came upon each other, she in hesitation at the door to the ladies’, I using the wall for a handrail. I was not drunk, I hold. Just smitten—by her dress, which was as blue as heaven’s bottom and at least four times as sparkly as a poet’s idea of nighttime; and by her legs, which were as long as hope itself; and by her skin, which seemed to glow like moonlight; and by her shoulder, which was bare and which something crooked in me wanted to lick.

I said nothing, and I would tell a jury now that I had nothing to say—not, at least, in this feeble language. Rather, I was listening: to Uncle Roy in mid-yowl and to cocktail

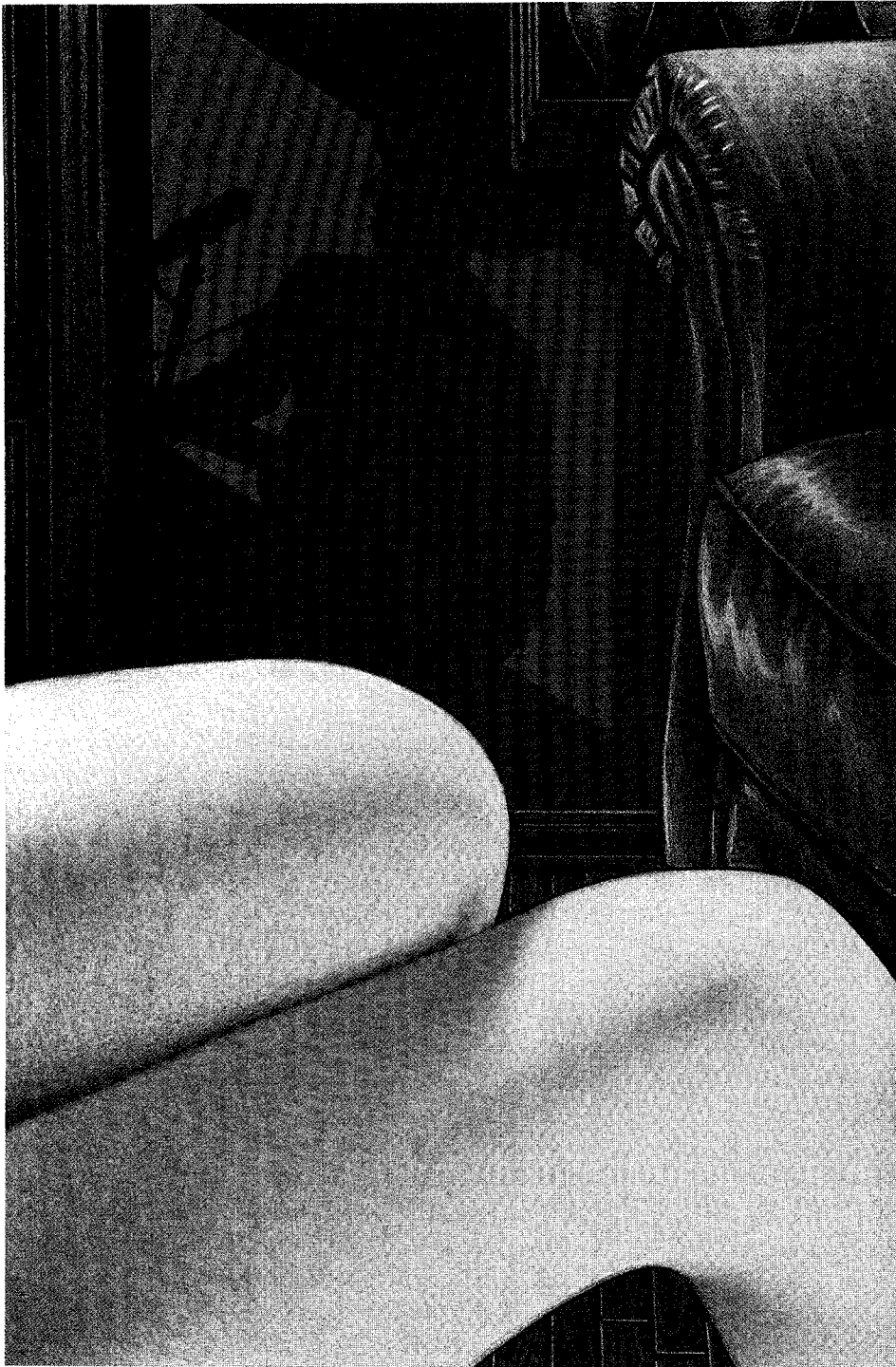
He was recently separated from
a wife he didn’t understand. He
was a father who tried to supply what
children are said to have need of.
But mainly he was a man wobbly in
the departments that public
moralists like to yatter about

chatter as annoying as power tools, not to mention to my own loose heart; and to my bones as they ground against the considerable meat I am; and to my breathing, which was certifiably gasplike; and to her own *swish-swish* as she marched deliberately toward me. Even when it had started, when we had pushed our way

down the hall to the trophy room and had locked its door and, in the glow of several weak but happy lights, I had touched her face and felt certain fibers in my chest snapping free, I didn’t talk. Did not wonder. To that jury that sits in my brain—and to the one in your very own—I would say that Heath Howell was but a bystander, no smarter about this than is a dog about democracy.

Deep down, of course, your narrator knew exactly what he was doing. He knew the fever that swamped him and the midnight hour and the green of her eyes and the hoopla outside. He knew, even between her legs and afterward, the sourness of his breath and where he’d come from in the world and how, a dozen years before, he’d gotten his wife to say yes, never mind the three children they had once vowed to rear together. Yes, Pokey Howell knew it all. And he expected it would come back to him, like a tide pent up in the oils and other liquids he was, when Betty Maxine Porter, in the hall, cocked her head as if sizing him up for an old suit she had before she took his hand, her own as cool as tap water, and placed it hard against her own hard crotch. But nothing came back to that man—unless you count, as I must, the cruelest hunger and the most vulgar thirst.

So yonder we went, she in the lead, I an animal eager to



catch up. Ours had been a sudden recognition, I say, and not knowledge you can have twice about the simplest thing you are. Behind us the door clicked, and we, like butchers or other workaday folks with common business to conduct, stripped ourselves. Time was moving by not in ticks and tocks but in whooshes and chunks, as fast as a nightmare you partly enjoy the terror of. A moment later I was in a chair sufficiently comfortable for a man five times as fat as I, and she was more or less astride me, still not saying her say or asking me mine. I was as erect as a fence pole, as hard as I've ever been and thoroughly amazed by it, and for a moment, before

I let myself go and waited to see her slip over her own crumbly cliff, nothing was happening between my head and my hoof but wind and fire and thudding organs.

A week later she would tell me why, but in those minutes when I had started to sweat and when I could see her face go slack but before various notions became plain, she said nothing. Inside her I was still stiff, spectacularly so, and she was wet in a way as spooky to me as travel in space. The world was coming back now, piece by piece—a screechy voice perilously close, another Uncle Roy tune I could sing two thirds of, the light in the farthest trophy case flickering, my cigarettes smashed in my shirt pocket, her weight on my thighs adding up pound by pound by pound until, nearly out of breath, I had to shift. Then I could see it, a thought sift through her face and almost get to her lips. She seemed to have settled something, a concern or an insight she had just found the sentence for, and I could feel her let me loose down below.

She would be off me in a second, I knew. She would be off and gathering up her pantyhose and slipping on her high heels and messing at her hair very professionally; but first she leaned close to me,

almost nose to nose, the light behind her as harsh as the word “no,” and she spoke, hers a sly smile to wonder about, hers a voice with as much rue in it as there is in mine when I tell a debtor the Goddamn end is nigh.

“So you’re a naughty so-and-so too,” she said. “Goody.”

THIS is why. The next time we met—at her place, on Fir Street, a ranchette-like spread that seemed to have been decorated by spirits too angry to have names in English—she said it was fate, a word she even bothered to spell for the houseguest in the three-piece suit.

"We were destined for each other, Pokey. You and me, a cosmic conspiracy."

I didn't know about such business, I told her. I was average, as undistinguished as white bread, plus burdened with a laugh like Daffy Duck's.

"Don't be modest, Pokey," she said, all but wagging her finger. "You're just enthusiastic, that's all."

I had been to college, I told her, where I had memorized enough about real estate and arithmetic to be my father's partner at the Farmers and Merchants Savings Bank, plus I was pretty fair at snooker, but about fate—a word I now believe too puny to describe what happens boy to girl—I knew only what you know when you tear up on Sunday morning that lottery ticket you bought Saturday night.

That is when she asked about Lizzie, the wife I was apart from but who, unbeknownst to me in the days I pawed over Betty Porter, was pregnant with our fourth child.

"There's nothing to know," I said. Lizzie was average too—just better than I with the please and thank-you necessary among our kind.

This was a weird afternoon, I tell you. Like events out of *The Twilight Zone* or the second page of *The National Enquirer*. Betty Porter had met me at the door in an outfit from the peignoir pages of a catalogue, and the instant I stepped inside she had roiled over me like a dust devil, pulling and tugging, her skin as hot as a frypan, both in and out of reach, on my neck when I thought she was about to tackle my knees, or at my ear with a whisper or two when I paused to get my balance. Then, as quickly as she'd begun, she stopped—became downright businesslike, more a teatime hostess than somebody who means to slap your naked butt like a farmyard beast to be shooed out of the way.

I was directed to sit on her couch, a leather monstrosity as red as the devil's hindmost. She put a drink in my hand, lemonade with too little sugar to get down easily, and sitting across from me, as prim as Sunday school itself, she ordered me to shut my trap—her phrase exactly.

"I got something to say," she said. "You got something to hear."

I was recently separated from a wife I didn't understand any more than I do high jinks in Hungary; I was a father who sought to cross the *ts* and dot the *is* that children are said to have need of, plus a taxpayer with a checking account big enough to pay for the minor disasters of bad weather and poor planning. But mainly I was a man wobbly in the departments that our public moralists like to yatter about, and so, not suspecting that in exactly fifty-one days I would say no, I said yes and waited to hear what Betty Porter, mistress and friend of fate, had to say about the to and fro that was she and I and planet Earth.

"Heath Howell," she began, "I intend to have you one hundred percent."

I was looking at the dozen or so candles on the coffee

table between us, thinking myself as suave as Yancy Derringer himself, when most of that round, usually nice number caught up with me.

"Don't be scared," she said.

I wasn't, I said. Big old thing like me.

"Then swallow," she said, "before you dribble on yourself."

She told me then, the whole kit and kaboodle—more words per minute than I could keep up with. How after Marv died, she was adrift, jumpy, et cetera. Not especially aggrieved. Just couldn't focus. Couldn't sleep. Like a person waving to America from the moon.

"That was tough," I said. "About Marvin, I mean."

She was getting something out of her eye—stage business, I think now, if a stage can be a living room as echoey as a hotel lobby.

"Marvin Porter was a high school assistant principal," she said, another tone completely. "About as exciting as Velveeta cheese."

I looked into my lemonade and found nothing there to study.

"He was company," she was saying. "And good enough, I guess. Now I want something more. I deserve it."

I should've gotten up. Honest. When she began talking about Marv—how he was a penny-pincher, for example, and not much of a poon hound; how he ironed his hankies—I should've risen and fled for the front door. But Betty Porter was heat and light and water—all things, all at once—and I, something dumb in nature, did not want one without the others.

"I have a proposal to make," she said at last.

She had candles. Furniture heavy enough to hurt you. A coatrack that all but picked your pocket when you came in the door. And now she had a proposal.

"I'm giving you six months," she said.

I took a drink here, and, using both hands, counted my way toward August. "For what?"

She laughed, as sharp as gunfire. "For you and me, silly. I'll be your girlfriend for six months. Then you've got to make up your mind. Elizabeth Howell or me."

In retrospect, here was another place for your narrator to rise. To button his cuffs. To reknit his tie. But in those days I wasn't good at thinking ahead. The moment belonged to her, strange and forbidden and fetched up only eight feet away, and yours truly, more than six feet of flesh that had somehow learned its ABCs and how to drive a pickup truck on the right side of the road.

"I've been watching you," she said. "Hell, I know which pump you use at Ray Bill's Texaco. Your shirt size. How much you paid for that house."

I chuckled. Your classic BMOC. "You've been busy," I said.

She sniffed—an allergy, I thought.

"I've been lonely, Howell."

I heard my blood then, as buzzy as a box of bees, and waited for my arm or hand or leg to act in some significant way. I could've thought of Lizzie, I suppose. Of my boys, Brad and Lonnie. Of their toddling sister, Mary Beth. But I didn't. The widow Porter had her own drink at her lips now, her slender throat yet another fine creature feature that Heath Howell could see himself crawling toward. I could smell her too. Roses and mint and what the skin gives off on its own. Then I wasn't thinking at all, my head as hollow as a gourd you could shoot a BB clean through, and I was standing—impossibly lonely my own self—and stepping toward her, behind me a million doors slamming shut.

LIZZIE has since said it was the sex. Well, sure. It was going into a room and knowing you had a surprise to find—a bomb, a flying saucer, Old King Cole himself. It was being blindfolded and turned a hundred times about, our desert a new vista to behold when it stopped spinning. It was a pulse, as loud as an oompah from a Sousa march, and the shriek that time makes when you are yanked from it. Hell, yes, it was the sex—what Lizzie's preacher, the Reverend Oram Tinsley, M.Div., once called the den and lair and roost of us. And for nearly two months it was more of everything than you're supposed to have in this vale. More of more.

And then one day—our fiftieth, in fact—it was something else, too.

"Pokey," she said. "Answer me this."

We'd been at it for an hour, we the litter on her queen-size bed, she reclining on her elbows and I on all fours ready for round two. I felt I hadn't taken a breath for a week.

"What's the capital of Peru?" she said, yet another new person to tussle with.

I looked around like a hungry pound dog ordered away from the dinner table. "What?"

"Peru," she said. "It's in South America."

I knew where it was, I said. Just—ha, ha, ha—didn't know where the mayhem was made.

"What about this?" she said, sitting up, I so close to her breasts that I could see their network of veins, plus a hickey I was awfully proud of being responsible for. "Where are King Solomon's mines?"

"Betty, what is this, a test?"

She was looking at me hard then, yours truly a goopy mess on the rug that you'd have to spend the whole afternoon scrubbing up.

"Just answer the question, Mr. Howell."

I made a show of checking my watch. I had to be at Lizzie's in two more hours to take the kids to the movies, an agreement we'd thought civilized way back when.

"This is a game, right?" I said.

"What about yogurt?" she said. "What's it made of?"

Don't know, I told her. Yogurt—ho, ho, ho—wasn't food I cared to fret much about.

She was out of bed now, tying the belt to her robe, and suddenly Heath Howell, the guy with the watch and the devil-may-care attitude, felt stupid to be naked and alone. Just another peckerwood caught picking his shorts up off the floor.

"What about the Seven Dwarfs?" she said. "Can you name them?"

I could, I declared, though a moment later I found myself two short. "Who's after Dopey?"

She was in her dressing room, a lovely thing in the mirror dabbing on lipstick. Evidently we were done for today.

"I suppose," she was saying, "you don't know the dates of Chester A. Arthur, right?"

I wanted to say something clever then, but didn't. Couldn't. Instead I suffered a vision of Marvin Porter, dead husband, cross-legged in the chair at the other end of the bedroom, an ironed hankie in the pocket of his sport coat and the answers to all questions on the tip of his silent tongue.

"Did you hear me?" Betty was saying. "I asked you to name the longest river."

I had my pants on now. Socks, too. I had a shirt somewhere and was hoping to locate it soon.

Then it came, more questions about X and Y and Z than I had heard since Deming Senior High School. What's the formula for determining the circumference of a circle? Who wrote *The King and I*? Who was the fifth Beatle? Where is Madagascar? How high is Mount Everest? When did Neil Armstrong land on the moon?

"Nineteen sixty-nine," I told her.

"What month?" she said.

I was dressed now, completely presentable, and Marvin Porter, former assistant principal in charge of attendance and discipline, had disappeared.

June was my guess. Maybe July.

She had come out of the dressing room, no evidence in her eyes or expression of what had happened elsewhere in her house that afternoon. She looked as she would were she to appear before the Luna County Commission to ask young Chairman Howell and his white-collar cronies for an emergency zoning variance.

"Pokey," she began, "how do you make it in the world?"

I thought about what I'd be doing an hour from now—in the dark with three young people, before us in images fifteen feet tall the world as it looked to somebody with a movie camera and an imagination as peculiar as the imagination itself.

"I manage, Betty. I do very well."

She had her arms crossed, her head tilted, and I was tempted to wipe my face, get the lint—or the spiders—off. It was a full minute, I'd say, time enough anyway to suck in the belly and square the shoulders for whatever came next.

"Heath, honey," she began, "you have to know stuff to get around. You got to have some facts. Some ideas."

I was looking at the picture above her bed, a chunky

sweetie pie on a horse leaning over to smooch a guy got up in the kind of armor Lancelot wore. "Stuff?" I said.

"That's right, darling." Hers was the high-wattage smile you see on folks who believe they'll live to be a hundred. "Knowledge of the world."

And then, convinced I knew what she was talking about, I was smiling too, I one day to be a very old man with this equally old woman, and she was ushering me to the door, hand at my elbow. "Girls' night out," she was saying. "Uncle Roy's playing at the Hitching Post." Next she had given me a good, if too brief, kiss on the cheek, and I was out in the sunlight, the day as hot as the fifth floor of Hades, and making my way down the walk to my Ford. She'd call me tomorrow, she was saying, tell me when to come over, tell me what—stuff, I hoped, glorious and wanton stuff—we'd do then.

LIZZIE found me in the front yard, sitting on Mary Beth's tricycle, every now and then ringing the bell on the handlebars.

"How long you been here?" she said.

I hadn't seen her in nearly a week, having picked up the children the time before this at her mother's house, so for an instant she looked like somebody I recognized only from a magazine. An instant later, naturally, she became someone I had known for more than half my life. Her hair, which was brown, was snatched up in a clip behind her ears. Her chin, which was strong, had a cute dimple in the center of it. Her eyes behind her sunglasses were as blue as lake water on a picture postcard from Colorado. Then, finally, I knew every other inch of her, heel to hair—another of us critters that I presumed to know the actual in and out of.

"You all right?" she said. "You look a little goofy, Pokey."

Screwy, isn't it? Like living at the whim of crackpots named

Zeus and Mars and Athena. Like having your back and forth managed by, oh, ghosts or gremlins or twinkly items who show up on your doorstep with wings flapping from their backsides. What I'm saying is that at the moment she found her wayward husband spread-legged on her daughter's trike, Lizzie already had her news. For three whole days she'd had it—that she was pregnant with what has turned out to be John Robert, now a child with two permanent teeth and a modest ability to run. For three whole days, news from grumpy Dr. Forest, a young fart who—so Lizzie once said—liked to practice his college Español over women with seven or eight or nine pounds of squalling, red-faced life to deliver. For three whole days, while I was shagging Betty Porter, Lizzie Elaine Howell, honors graduate of the University of New Mexico and onetime assistant director of services for the city of Deming, had had her news, her own secret, and she'd already made up her mind about both it and the other human being it might grow to resemble. Fate? Whatever. Watch it come.

"Where are the kids?" was what I said next.

"Brushing their teeth." She was standing between me and the sunset, her shadow stretching from me to the street and halfway up the door panel of my four-by-four. "I fed them earlier, so don't buy too much junk. No more than one Coke each, okay?"

That was dandy, I said, and then—on account of the unaccountable parts of me, I assume—I was talking this talk: "Lizzie, you know the capital of Peru?"

She looked at me the way I imagined I had looked at Betty only an hour before: perplexed, as if the joker in front of her were wearing an arrow through his ears.

"Lima," she said. "I'm not sure."

I nodded then, thankful, and found myself ringing the bell one last time. "That's what I thought," I said, rising to my feet. Time to see what Walt Disney knew about things. "I'll have them back by nine, okay?"

It was coming, her news. Quick and dire and three days old. Or, rather, it had already come. Heath Howell just hadn't heard it. He'd been thinking about his socks, the intricate pattern the machines at Gold Toe had knitted together. Socks and the tassels on his loafers, plus a black bug as thick as his thumb crawling its way through the thatchy Bermuda grass between his feet.

"It's a boy," she said.

Socks and shoes, a bug and something that was a boy.

"What?" I said.

"I'm pregnant, Pokey. About three months, Sherman says. They did an ultrasound."

Sherman Forest. Dr. *Buenos días* himself. "When?" I said.

She wasn't sure, she said, her shadow not moving even one iota. In January, probably. Maybe at the Commissioners Congress in Gallup. Maybe after that champagne reception. Maybe in that Holiday Inn. Maybe on that bed in that Holiday Inn. Maybe.

AMONG ENGLISH VERBS

Among English verbs

to die is oddest in its

eagerness to be *dead*,

immodest in its

haste to be told—

a verb alchemical

in the head:

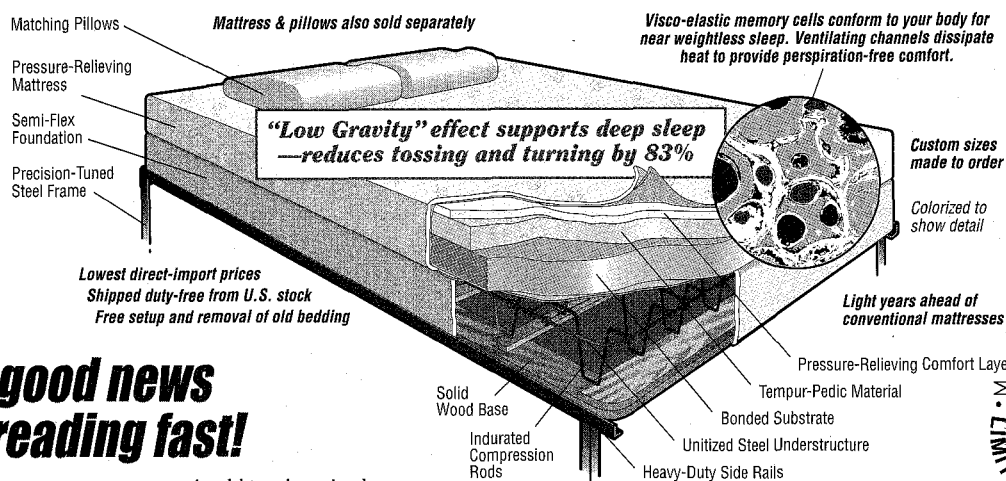
one speck of its gold

and a whole life's lead.

—KAY RYAN

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HERE'S THE LIFE-CHANGING SWEDISH SLEEP SYSTEM JUST REPORTED ON 'DATELINE NBC DISCOVERY'!



The good news is spreading fast!

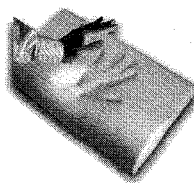
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"You're crying," I said—something harmless to say.

"It's a cold, Heath. Pay attention."

I was. I was paying attention to the heat. And to the wind. And to our daughter, Mary Beth, now behind the screen door, ready to go. Yes, I was paying attention—to the gravel and the grain of us, the string and the spit, the mud and the melt we are.

"I'm keeping it, Pokey. Him, I mean. The baby."

I was hearing everything clearly now. Her words. My breath. The ugly thump of one heart.

"What about me?" I said—not the only selfish sentiment Heath Howell had that evening.

"What about you?" she said.

The children came out of the house then, as wooden as play soldiers, and went straight for my truck. "Hi, Dad," Lonnie said on his way by, the oldest one, in charge. "Hi, Son," I said—my words, given the fist in my gullet, unexpectedly loud. They climbed in, boys in the back, Mary Beth buckled in the front, three small citizens for Pokey Howell to keep track of.

"You're going to be late," Lizzie said.

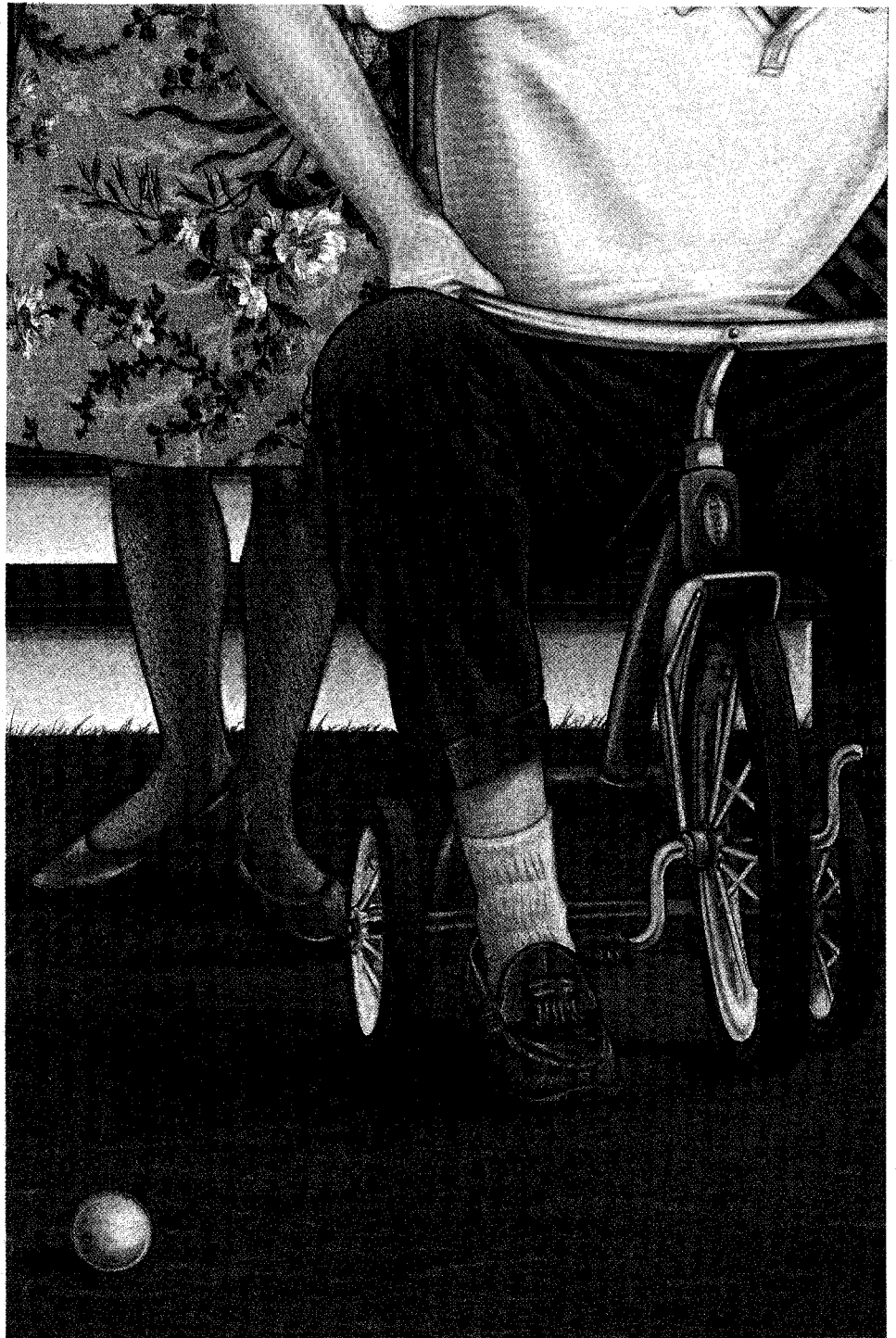
I'd put the shot in high school. I, a Wildcat in warm-up pants and a green-and-white shirt. I, with eight pounds of lead cradled in my right hand. I in the circle, the shot between my chin and shoulder, crouching, coiled. Strong enough for second place. I was thinking about that. And about Lizzie one day in the stands, in her lap an algebra book she would later conk me on the head with for getting fresh.

"Why'd we go bust, Lizzie?"

She was beside me now, the two of us hip to hip, watching our well-behaved heirs.

"I don't know," she said. "You got bored, honey."

You could see the arm of one shadow then, mine, rise



to the shoulder of the other, a sight worth a picture or two. "I'll see you later, Lizzie."

Then those shadows parted—one to the house, the other to the rest of the story.

It was *The Lion King* that evening. Simba and Scar and Timon, and four Howells howling from the front row. They ate rope licorice and Paydays and jumbo buttered popcorn, the junkiest of junk. Yes, the Howell clan, and a hundred others probably, all went "ooohhh" and "aaahhh" and rooted hard for the good guys.

Then it was the house on Palace Circle and three little ones saying “Night, Dad,” followed by the apartment on Olive Street and Dad there in the night. Then it was hours—more than a few, so the clock claimed—and I moving among them, chair to stool to bed to chair again, the world without a root or a hook to hang on to.

Newsweek had come, in it typing about Clinton and Saddam and that sappy Russian drunk Yeltsin—more woe you’re relieved to see happening to the other fellow. But I kept losing my place, something about Syria becoming something about a homegrown villain becoming something about a wolf in Wisconsin. On the dining-room table my briefcase was open, in it spreadsheets of which I was known to be the master. Tomorrow my father and Bert Cummins, our treasurer, would want to know what the numbers said, but in these minutes those figures seemed about as familiar to me as the Persian our enemies speak.

To my credit, I did stay away from the whiskey. At midnight I was away from it, as I was when the clock next gonged, and gonged again. At three, however, I was with it, a juice glass with a lone cube of ice to keep myself respectable. After that I was respectable at least a dozen more times. I considered the small things nearby—the chair and table holding me up, the floor holding them. I considered, too, the big—love, and the inward idiots we are because of it. I even thought about that sizable black bug, wondering if it had gotten where it was going. Then it was morning, and, remarkably, Heath Howell was ready for it—buttoned and zipped, buckled and buffed. He was that go-getter at the well-waxed conference table across from two cigar-puffing coots with bank books as thick as the Yellow Pages and hair as white as storybook Christmas snow.

“I can’t say,” I was saying into the phone.

To which she, Betty Porter, was saying, “Go on, Pokey. Guess.”

Across from me my father and Bert Cummins were grinning and whacking each other on the back—textbook wheeler-dealers. The numbers, a piece of me understood, were exceptional. For all they cared, the youngster in the room could’ve been exchanging confidences with the Count of Monte Cristo.

“I really can’t talk now, ma’am,” I said, aiming to be a customer so cool he’d just arrived from frozen Alaska.

“I’m looking in the mirror,” she whispered. “Know what I see?”

I could imagine, a bolt as thick as my wrist twisting in my stomach.

“I’m wearing a corset, Pokey. I look good enough to eat.”

Bert Cummins was hacking now, a wiry man with a length of wire to spit out. Really excited. Umpteen umpteens ago he had given me my nickname—for the sensible way I go from hither to yon—and suddenly I hated him for it.

“That’s a joke, Pokey.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, still pretending I wasn’t talking to a woman with a great many ideas.

“You come by at seven,” she said. “I got something for you, too. A silk something.”

Again I said my say, still hoping the right side was still right side up.

“Seven sharp, Pokey. You don’t keep a lady waiting.”

And then I was through. The phone was down, Bert Cummins had got his breath back from wherever it went, Howell Senior was firing up another stogie, and Heath Howell was waiting for the hinges and hasps of himself to stop squeaking.

You don’t keep a lady waiting. Yes, that was true. You don’t a lot of things for a lady. You don’t carp and bitch and do the runaround. You don’t, no matter the matter, lie and cheat and scold. You don’t overlook or undersay or mealy-mouth. You don’t wheedle. You don’t whine. You don’t fuss and fume. You don’t. You really, really don’t.

But, as regular as sunset, you do.

Your morning goes by, and you do. Your lunch, and you do. Your afternoon. Your close of business. Your drive home. Your open door. And then you are collapsed in your easy chair, a big boy still dressed for the working world, and beside you the phone is ringing—you, luckily, with an answering machine modern enough to do all the lying for you.

“Pokey,” she said. “Are you there? It’s quarter after, darling. Mysteries await.”

She went on, as giggly as a schoolgirl, for another minute—she’d driven to El Paso, shopped at the Luv Connection, gotten us some toys to play with—but I didn’t pick up. Instead I watched the tape go round and took note of the shapes that were my loyal companions in the dark. My TV, my coffee table, my unlit lamps. I was thinking about Lizzie, about the bit of me dividing inside her. Maybe, à la his old man, he’d be able to roll his tongue. Maybe he’d have my cowlick, my teeny ears. Maybe, a chip from a chip from a chip, he’d be inclined to sloth. Lordy, I thought. Heath Howell knew some stuff now, didn’t he?

By eight o’clock I still hadn’t moved. And the phone was ringing again.

“Are you sick?” she was saying. “I’m worried about you, Pokey. You want me to come over?”

No, I was not sick. I was, in fact, not anything. Not blood. Not bone. I was empty, one me for ten mes to rattle around in.

“Pokey, you don’t move, okay? I’ll be right there.”

Smoke, I told myself—and did, the Marlboro Man and I strengthening our relationship in the dark. Outside, I supposed, the stars were twinkling, up where up ought to be. I supposed that on Palace Drive, TV was being watched and noise was being made by three extraordinary noisemakers. I supposed that my father, behind the wheel of his brand-new Lincoln Town Car, was taking his supper at Del Cruz’s Triangle Drive-In. I supposed that my wife, Elizabeth Elaine Howell, was folding laundry or balancing her checkbook. But about here—the Olive Street Apartments, No. 6—I had

nothing to suppose: I was just a man, now four cigarettes older, and somebody was rapping on my front door.

"It's Betty," she was saying. "Pokey?"

That would be me, I supposed.

"Open the door, baby," she said. "I'll perk you right up."

That Valentine's Day dance. I was hearing Uncle Roy again, a stringbean cowpoke with a guitar he'd named Dynamite. I was seeing again that squishy chair occupied by the human beings Porter and Howell. And those trophies, silver and gold and bronze, on several shelves behind them. I was thinking about Mr. Howell's brain, the knobs and knuckles of it, the fancy thoughts it cooked up. About the man's self, the narrow and the wide of it. About the man, his good fortune on earth.

"I know you're in there," she said. "I can see you smoking."

Mr. Howell. Born in February, 1957. Mother deceased. An only child. Christened Heath after an uncle on the father's side. Married in 1982. A double-ring ceremony. Hundreds in attendance. Hundreds, I say.

"Betty," I began, each word to follow twice the weight of the last, "I think I'll stay put tonight."

For an instant, and for another, I imagined the hole to heaven, which was small and tight and already closing fast on my tail.

"You're dumping me, aren't you?" Betty said. "I absolutely do not believe this, Heath Howell."

I lit another cigarette. This time of night I could be home in fifteen minutes. Twelve if I made the light at Iron.

"When I leave," she was saying, "I'm not coming back. It will be over, you understand?"

Mrs. Porter. The edge after the edge. The other side. The way beyond the way.

"You won't be welcome at my place either, mister. You know that, don't you?"

I could see her silhouette, and I tried to imagine why she hadn't moved, left. She was, after all, a woman with a big house. A woman with big furniture. She had ideas. She knew about the Tigris, the why of a zillion whats. Hell, she knew atomic numbers. And words from the least visited pages of the dictionary.

And then, bless her, she had moved. And—a little sadly, I thought—she had spoken.

"Pokey Howell, you're a coward."

One final fact.

YOU think you know how this turns out, but you're wrong. Yes, yours truly does go home, but it's too late—"Too too," the wife tells him—so by December of that year Heath and Lizzie are no longer Mr. and Mrs., Bert Cummins having done the legal paperwork on both sides of the fence. Then, inexplicably, it is January, raw with cold; then March, windy but good for sleeping; then June, and

Pokey Howell sports a beard he looks 60 percent sharp with.

Of an evening you can find him sharing a meal with his kids or his father, or enjoying a snack from the grill at the country club. During the day you can find him behind his desk, still a big man on the outside. Some nights you can find him playing draw poker with four fellows from the bank, or watching what CNN thinks is useful for him to know. Sometimes you even find him with his nose in a book, for a chapter or two shaking his head over some made-up hero's hardbound ups and downs.

Then, one day in late July, you can find him parked outside Betty Porter's house on Fir Street, waiting for his body to catch up with his mind. A minute later he's on her doorstep, ringing her bell, his dialogue about three quarters memorized. He's there for old times, he thinks. Maybe—har-de-har-har—new times, too.

And then the door has been opened and there she stands, "Pokey" a greeting about as heartfelt as heatstroke.

"Betty," he says, the next thing to say not the next thing he says. "Can I come in?"

She looks over her shoulder, back in the house, before turning to him again, a little mischief in her eye.

"This is not a good time, Pokey."

Behind her, down the hall toward the bedroom, someone is singing a tune peppy enough to tap your toes to. A man—too yodely for this time of day.

"Got company," he says.

She does, she says, and it hits him then. With a whomp.

"Uncle Roy," he says, to which she nods.

"The one and only."

Heath Howell studies the street then. He knows this road. He knows the house next door, too. And the scraggly trees. And the dusty cars parked in the driveway.

"Is there something on your mind, Pokey?"

Oh, there is, and, the gears of him grinding and banging, he says as much.

"Bashful," he begins. "People forget about him. Doc, most folks remember. Grumpy, too. Sleepy, all the rest. But Bashful, well—"

For a moment she seems puzzled, and Heath Howell has the urge, a shiver from his toes to his teeth, to touch her hair, to hold her breast, to taste her neck. Just once more he wants to be inside her—hot and wild and falling free.

"Bashful," she says.

"The one and only."

He's doing a lot of nodding now. This street. This house. This door. Fate has put a lot here for him to nod at.

"Is that all, Pokey? I've got a guest."

The ground is moving now. Only a little time left.

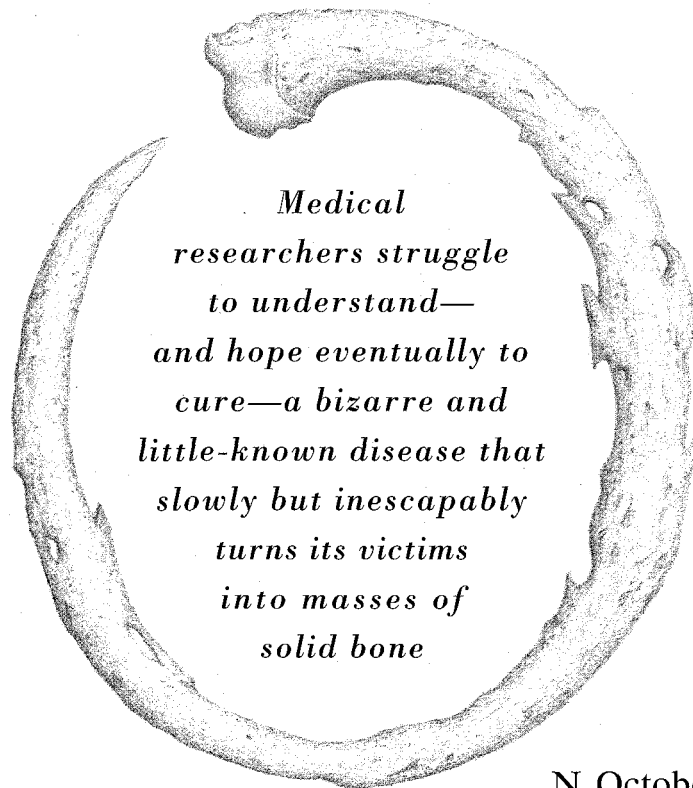
"You didn't say anything about the beard," he says.

She's giving him one of her looks again, hard and dry and as deadly as a bullet.

That's right, she says. She didn't. ☞

A FEW HUNDRED PEOPLE TURNED TO BONE

by THOMAS MAEDER



*Medical
researchers struggle
to understand—
and hope eventually to
cure—a bizarre and
little-known disease that
slowly but inescapably
turns its victims
into masses of
solid bone*

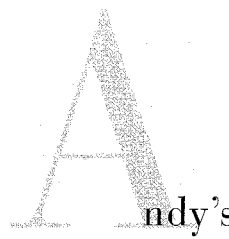
N October 30, 1995, Harry Eastlack arrived for a two-day symposium at the Wyndham Franklin Plaza Hotel, in Philadelphia. Forty-three families of people with fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, or FOP, were joining a high-powered assortment of orthopedic surgeons, molecular biologists, geneticists, and other doctors and scientists in hopes of making

some sense of this puzzling disease. Harry's sister and her husband volunteered to entertain the children afflicted with FOP and their siblings while their parents attended professional sessions and swapped experiences. Harry himself played no active role. He had died in 1973. Yet his silent presence revealed the tragedy and the challenge of FOP more eloquently than any chart, slide, or clinical description ever could.

Harry Eastlack normally dwells in a glass case in the Mutter Museum, at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, not

far from the death cast of Chang and Eng, the original Siamese twins, and a host of other anatomical curiosities. Before Harry died, six days shy of his fortieth birthday, he bequeathed his body to his treating physicians. Harry's body was now what it had sought to become all of his life: pure bone. While he was alive, Harry never met another person with FOP. Fred Kaplan, an orthopedic surgeon and the world's leading authority on FOP, thought the time had come for others to meet Harry. Harry's family enthusiastically agreed.

"I saw a woman today who finally became hard as wood all



 body is

 virtually straight,

 with his legs

 slightly crossed,

 while Nancy is

 mildly bent at the

 waist. Nancy's

 jaw is fused, and

 recently Andy's

 fused as well, a

 circumstance that

 forced him to give

 up the trumpet.

muscles, tendons, and ligaments of FOP sufferers into bone. Sheets of bone cover Harry's back like a carapace. Ribbons and struts of bone lock his skull to his spine, span and immobilize his shoulder and hip joints. Thin stalagmites and stalactites of bone launch themselves from his pelvis and thighs. A slender white bridge across Harry's vacant rib cage delicately but firmly welds his upper arm directly to his breastbone.

FOP is not fatal, though patients often die young, starving after their jaws freeze shut or succumbing to respiratory problems if new bone bends their bodies and constricts their lungs. Well-meaning attempts to break free the joints or to carve away excess bone invariably make things worse. The FOP body believes that its heterotopic ("other" + "place") bone is normal, and heals these perceived injuries with more bone than was there before. Any injury to muscle or connective tissue, including falls and simple bumps, can precipitate a "flare-up." The area becomes hot, red, swollen, and painful, and within days or weeks forms a piece of new bone. A joint can lock overnight, never to move again. Even

over," the French physician Guy Patin wrote to a colleague in 1692. This perfunctory note is the first clinical description of FOP. "It may be the strangest disease there is," Kaplan says. "It's the closest thing you'll find in real life to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*."

Even people whose knowledge of skeletal anatomy comes from Halloween costumes or cartoons recognize that Harry is out of the ordinary. Normal skeletons collapse into piles of loose bones if the flesh and connective tissue that joined them in life are removed. To be displayed in a human-shaped arrangement, skeletons must be "articulated"—rigged together with fine wires and glue. Harry offered little challenge to the articulator's craft, because his skeleton was already nearly fused into one piece. A transformation that begins in childhood and progresses relentlessly throughout life turns the

the muscle trauma of a childhood immunization may induce the body to form a spur of new bone. Sufferers may end up fused in a standing position, so rigid that they can sleep leaning in a corner, or perpetually sitting, or twisted to one side. Otherwise they are perfectly healthy, and with today's improved nutrition and medical care can live to ripe old age. They are normal people trapped in personal prisons.

A STUDENT FOREVER

FRED Kaplan's involvement with FOP began through a combination of accident and his insatiable curiosity. A slight, agile man of forty-six, with the dapper grace of Fred Astaire and a quick, nervous, precise way of speaking, he is a charming example of what doctors should be. He learned about bones early in his life, he says, by breaking a lot of them as an amateur jockey. Later he was drawn to orthopedic surgery because it seemed a vast and open field, full of possibilities. When Kaplan was invited to give an address at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1988, he recalled his own third year of medical school, when he couldn't quite make up his mind and an adviser drew him aside to ask what specialty he planned to choose, saying, "You can't be a student forever, Fred." Kaplan's eyes lit up. What a *wonderful* ambition, he said to himself. That's exactly what I'll be—a student forever. Penn medical students, even those with no interest in bones, clamor to do projects under his guidance: word has gotten around that he is humble and curious enough to learn, and generous enough to teach well.

In 1987, while Kaplan sat picking his way through a journal article on bone and genetics, a student, Jeff Tabas, dropped in to chat.

"Do you understand this stuff, Jeff?" Kaplan asked.

"Of course I do, Dr. Kaplan. We have to know that to get into medical school." Jeff explained introns, exons, and gene splicing. "You know, Dr. Kaplan, a whole world has opened up since you were in medical school. Maybe you should learn something about it."

Kaplan did. He bought genetics textbooks and read them straight through. He took a crash course in genetics at the Jackson Laboratory, in Bar Harbor, Maine. His imagination captured by this mysterious new field, Kaplan began looking for someone with whom he could have a sabbatical.

One day Kaplan sat talking to medical students in a doctors' lounge. A dark-haired, bearded stranger a few years older than he walked in and began to listen. Eventually he introduced himself as Michael Zasloff and asked whether Kaplan had ever heard of a disease called FOP. Kaplan had two FOP patients and had often thought about the disease, though not very productively. Medicine offered no conceptual framework for it. After a few hours of conversation with Zasloff, though, Kaplan knew where he was going to spend his sabbatical, and that he and Zasloff would study the ge-

netics and molecular biology of FOP. From this chance encounter was born an interdisciplinary collaboration that has yielded profound and surprising insights, not only into FOP but also into the process by which skeletons are made.

ZASLOFF'S FOP PROGRAM

MICHAEL Zasloff saw his first FOP patient at Johns Hopkins, in 1977, while he had a fellowship in medical genetics under Victor McKusick, the father of the field. Zasloff was a pediatrician with a Ph.D. in biochemistry. He worked at the National Institutes of Health pursuing research on basic genetic mechanisms, but he liked to keep one foot in the clinic.

"I saw a young lady sitting in the waiting room with her neck and head stiffly posed quite askew. The left side of her neck was terribly swollen, and she was clearly in significant pain." Monica Anderson was eight years old. McKusick had diagnosed her FOP when she was three. The disease had been quiescent until a few days earlier, when she whipped her head around while on an amusement-park ride, inflicting just enough trauma to trigger a flare-up. Monica was fortunate that McKusick had already identified her disease. Few other physicians in the world had even heard of FOP. Too often, when terrified parents rushed their children to the hospital at the first flare-up, doctors mistook the alarming tissue growth for aggressive malignant tumors and ordered emergency surgery or chemotherapy. A prominent surgeon amputated the entire right arm and shoulder of one little girl whose condition he tragically misjudged.

Zasloff's residency at Children's Hospital in Boston had familiarized him with many esoteric pediatric diseases, he told me, but nothing at all like this. "So I began to ask questions of Victor McKusick, who was probably the world expert on FOP at the time: 'Dr. McKusick, what do these lesions mean?' He said, 'I don't really know.' 'What do you think is causing it?' He said, 'I don't know.' I asked, 'What are we going to do about it?' He said, 'Well, I can tell you what *doesn't* work.'"

McKusick's classic textbook, *Heritable Disorders of Connective Tissue*, discusses FOP at great length within a chapter on other disorders. A few hundred cases had been reported since Guy Patin's single sentence in 1692, yet the level of understanding had barely increased. The disease was so strange and rare that not only weren't there any answers but no one was even asking questions.

Zasloff, a man irresistibly drawn to unexplained anomalies, studied records of past NIH and Johns Hopkins cases, pored over histology slides, and asked McKusick to refer new FOP patients to him. Zasloff began to formulate theories, but the time, sometimes the scientific techniques, and above all the patient population he needed simply were not there. He began a small clinical study to see whether he could pharmacologically inhibit the formation of hetero-

topic bone—work that yielded modest yet discernible results.

"My senior staff at NIH weren't against this project," he says, "but basically they couldn't have cared less. It was regarded by a lot of people as a waste of time and money." With his small and varied patient population, a statistically valid study was virtually impossible to construct. "So a lot of people asked, 'Even if you do this clinical trial, what does it mean?' Well, to the FOP patients it could mean a lot."

In 1986 Zasloff serendipitously discovered a new family of potent antibiotics in the skin of the African clawed frog. Work on "magainins," as he called them, from the Hebrew word for "shield," quickly commandeered his attention and the full resources of his lab. Zasloff's efforts to develop magainins as therapeutically useful drugs were frustrated within the bureaucracy of the NIH, and he ultimately left to continue his work at the University of Pennsylvania. A company was founded to commercialize his discovery.

Unfortunately, Zasloff's departure meant the demise of his FOP program. A colleague notified all FOP patients that they need not bother to return. Being turned away from the NIH, often the last resort for people with rare or "orphan" diseases, was a devastating blow. "It's like going to Mecca," Fred Kaplan says, "and being told that there is no hope."

One of the abandoned victims was a woman in her late twenties named Jeannie Peeper. Her disease had been diagnosed by an astute University of Michigan physician when she was four, and she'd had a normally active childhood until ninth grade, when her left hip and shoulder suddenly seized up. Still, she finished high school, moved to Florida, and earned a degree in social work while living on her own. Two weeks after graduation she fell and injured her right hip, an accident that cost her all mobility in that joint. Peeper was referred to Zasloff in 1985 (she was told he was the only doctor in the world who cared about FOP) to ask whether a hip replacement could help her. He said it could not.

Medically, Zasloff could do little for Jeannie Peeper except explain what was going wrong with her body. But during their periodic conversations his understanding and sympathy and the mere fact that he knew others like her made her feel less isolated in her disease. When, during a visit in October of 1987, he told her of his impending move, she asked if he could introduce her to another FOP patient. Zasloff put her in touch with Monica Anderson, by then a college student, and each young woman spoke to a fellow sufferer for the first time in her life.

As a parting gift, Zasloff gave Jeannie Peeper the complete list of living FOP patients known to the NIH—a scant eighteen names. He suggested that she might want to form a pen-pal club. Instead, her curiosity whetted by her conversation with Monica Anderson, Peeper mailed out letters and questionnaires asking for date of diagnosis, hobbies, interests, and a few other medical and personal details. Eleven people promptly replied, among them Nancy Whitmore,

in Michigan, who was already active as an advocate for the handicapped. Rather than a pen-pal club they started a newsletter, the *FOP Connection*; the first issue was published in early 1988, funded by Peeper's Social Security checks. In June they incorporated the International FOP Association, with Peeper as president and Nancy Whitmore as vice-president. An FOP community had been born.

HOW BONE GROWS

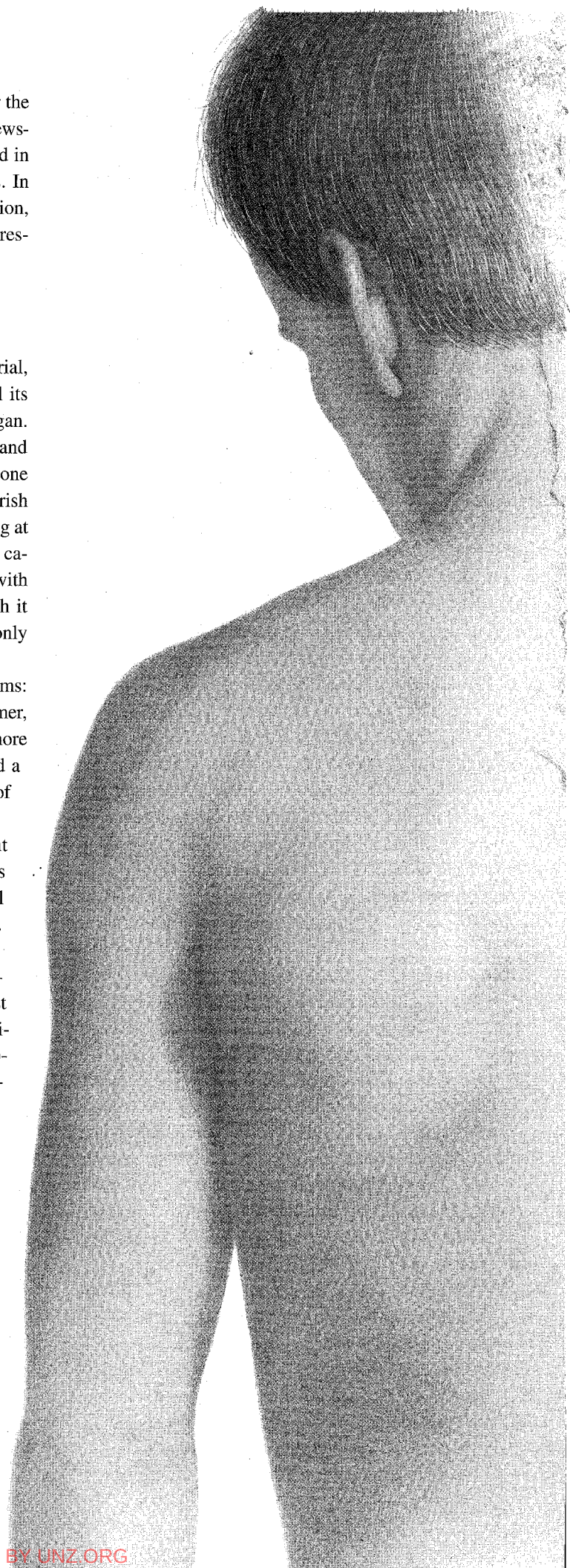
WE tend to think of bone as dead structural material, like the girders of a skyscraper, which we call its skeleton. In reality bone is an active, living organ. Bones become longer and thicker as the body grows, and strengthen or weaken according to the load they bear. Bone marrow produces the red and white blood cells that nourish and protect our tissues, and platelets that stop the bleeding at the site of an injury. Bone has remarkable regenerative capacities: under optimal conditions broken bones heal with no scar, new living material fixing the defect as though it had never been. Ordinarily, growth and repair are the only reasons that new bone appears after birth.

The body makes bone through two distinct mechanisms: intramembranous and endochondral formation. In the former, bone cells, or osteoblasts, sit on top of bone and secrete more bony substance, like bricklayers stacking bricks to build a wall. Intramembranous bone formation thickens the top of the skull and widens the shaft of long bones.

Endochondral bone formation is a radically different process, reminiscent of the lost-wax technique that artists use to cast sculptures. The body forms a cartilage model that is then infiltrated, resorbed, and replaced by true bone. This is how bones grow longer, and how fractures heal.

Endochondral bone formation is also the embryo's predominant method of constructing its skeleton in the first place. During the first two months after conception, primitive mesenchymal tissue condenses into pre-cartilage representations of most of the bones in the body, which gradually become cartilage and finally bone. This embryonic skeleton emerges from its undifferentiated ancestor cells in a regular sequence, the way parts of the image in an instant photograph slowly seep into view: first the back structures, then the front, head before tail, trunk before thighs and upper arms, then lower legs and forearms, ankles and wrists, fingers and, very last, toes.

When Kaplan and Zasloff decided to launch an FOP research program at Penn, the first challenge was to characterize the nature and natural history of the disease. The method and distribution of new-bone formation in FOP had never been accurately documented. A century or more of medical literature was filled with ambiguities, contradictions, and errors. Earlier investigators generally assumed that the bone





formed through the intramembranous process. Perhaps they could more easily imagine pockets of renegade bone cells running amok. Kaplan's group looked at tissue samples of active FOP lesions, biopsies that had been taken before the right diagnosis was made, and determined conclusively that the disease used the endochondral pathway.

Doctors had always known that heterotopic bone did not appear randomly over the body. The neck and upper back were usually affected first. Some joints were nearly always involved, while others, such as those in the hands and feet, showed symptoms much later and to a lesser degree. Zasloff had begun studying the pattern while at the NIH, and Kaplan's group at Penn, with a steadily growing patient population, systematically surveyed forty-four people joint by joint. Most people might have a hard time accurately dating their personal histories of bumps, cuts, sprains, and breaks, but for people with FOP, injuries tend to mark memorable stages of life. "Like the last time you walk up a stair," says Andy Sando, a man in northern Michigan who lost leg mobility after a fall. "It was April 29, 1985. That's the exact date. I knew after I took that last step: I'm never going to do that again."

The researchers discovered that the age at which ossification began varied from one person to the next, but the sequence of joint involvement was almost always the same: first the neck and spine, then the shoulders, the hips and elbows, the knees and wrists, the ankles, and finally the jaw. Back to front, head to tail, trunk to appendages, proximal to distal—the pattern was hauntingly familiar, reminiscent of the sequence of endochondral bone formation in the embryo. The embryo models its skeleton by condensing undifferentiated mesenchyme cells into cartilage and then bone. In some mysterious and profoundly disturbing way the FOP body was recruiting existing connective tissue and transforming it into bone, bone that often retained the shape of the muscles or ligaments that it had once been.

"These people aren't just forming little bones here and there," Kaplan says. "They are forming *a whole extra skeleton*. It doesn't necessarily look like the first one, but that's what it is. It's extraordinary that a differentiated tissue like a muscle or a tendon can turn into another differentiated tissue, like a bone. It's like crossing all the lanes of a busy highway. Developmental biology is not known to *work* that way. You never see the brain turn into the pancreas. You never see the kidney turn into the heart. You never even see the stomach turn into the small intestine. But here you see what seems to be perfectly normal muscle turn into perfectly normal bone. *Normal* bone. It looks normal. It looks normal on x-ray and under the microscope. It behaves like normal bone—if it bears weight, it gets denser, and if it doesn't bear weight, it becomes osteoporotic. If you break it, it heals, just like a normal fracture. It even contains marrow. It's normal in every way except one: it shouldn't be there."

LIVING WITH FOP

KAPLAN has always seen patients regularly in his office, but to form a better idea of their daily lives he began visiting them where they lived. In January of 1991 he and Randy Cohen, one of the first FOP research fellows, flew to northern Michigan to see a married couple with FOP: Andy and Nancy (née Whitmore) Sando.

The Sandos, in their late thirties, have a vitality and a charm that transcend their surprising physical appearance. Both recline in power wheelchairs. Andy's body is virtually straight, with his legs slightly crossed, while Nancy is mildly bent at the waist. Their necks are both solidly locked. Nancy's jaw is fused, and recently Andy's fused as well, a circumstance that forced him to give up the trumpet. Their elbows are locked at nearly identical right angles; at rest they sit with their upper arms at their sides, fingers laced together, almost as though in prayer. Their wrists and fingers are barely affected, giving them the ability to manipulate things if they use a bit of ingenuity. Each has a cordless phone fastened to a two-foot-long stick. Nancy extends her reach with her "itcher stick," a wooden back scratcher that she finds invaluable. She is a surprisingly efficient typist, able to peck at an angled computer keyboard with a device she fashioned thirteen years ago—a dowel with the rubber tip of a baby pacifier taped to each end.

Nancy led a normal life until the age of five. Then one September evening her mother started to bathe her and suddenly let out a scream. On the back of the little girl's neck, concealed beneath her long blonde hair, was a warm, reddish, doughy mass almost the size of a grapefruit. Nancy's parents rushed her to the hospital, where she spent almost six weeks while the doctors ran tests and took biopsies. She returned home with a diagnosis of terminal cancer and the bleak prognosis that she would not live until Christmas. Nancy's parents waited for the end, withdrawing as people so often do from the dying. But Christmas came and went and Nancy got no worse. In fact, once the pain of this first flare-up passed, she began to look much better. Her parents consulted a series of specialists, and after a few months had a correct diagnosis of FOP.

Until she was eight, new bone appeared in Nancy's shoulders and down her spine. For seven years her condition was stable; then, when she was fifteen, her left shoulder froze and she lost most of the motion in her left elbow. An ill-advised operation on her right elbow had the inevitable effect of making it worse. Nancy carried on normally, though instead of playing on the playground or joining sports teams she managed the school greenhouse and helped to run the office. Five years later she fell while getting into a car; a new spurt of bone growth began in her right hip and quickly progressed downward, locking her knee and ankle. Nine

FALLING WATER

Wherever it commences perhaps as random
raindrop tapping on a leaf and tumbling
into a tea-stained mosscup

it helplessly inquires after
lower levels whether seeping
darkly through silt

and marl to enlarge an imprisoned
aquifer shortcut or taking its chances to trickle
out through a slit of clay to join its first

brook and amble off into the yielding
soft-shouldered marsh past fat roots of
lilies to linger among the slick fronds

of algae paddled by ducks pierced by
pickerel to hurry itself and
whisk into the outlet that will boil it

along a streambed grid of gravel toward another
stairstep of idleness the lucid
lake spritzed with sparkling sun

there to seek its breach to tip and hurtle into
yawning torrent and the great meander
that will sweep it slow and away out

and empty into the broad salt
sleep that will cradle it until
the sun siphons it again
to knit into more rain.

—PETER DAVISON

months later her left leg started to be affected. She began to use a walker and then a motorized scooter. At twenty-four she was fitted for a custom wheelchair.

Nancy studied computer programming and got a job in a computer store. She was so popular and successful that she left after six months to start her own consulting business. She worked forty or fifty hours a week in addition to pursuing a full schedule of volunteer activities as an advocate for the handicapped and a speaker at churches and civic-group meetings. In 1983 she gained a degree of local notoriety when, to illustrate the challenge that the sidewalks and buildings of her home town posed to the handicapped, she persuaded a newspaper reporter and a Kiwanis Club member to get into wheelchairs and carry out a set of tasks she assigned.

After work on April 12, 1985, a special bus with a wheelchair lift picked Nancy up at a client's company. The driver parked outside the house Nancy shared with her sister and brother-in-law and lowered the motorized wheelchair lift from its vertical, folded position to form a horizontal platform. She rolled herself on and locked her wheels in place. The bus service owned several vehicles with lifts made by different manufacturers, each with different hand-held controls. On the most common model the bottom one of three buttons lowered the platform to the ground. On the bus Nancy rode that day, when the driver pushed the bottom button, it folded the platform back into the bus. Nancy was catapulted backward, and ended up with her head and shoulders against the opposite side of the bus.

Over the years the muscles in Nancy Whitmore's neck had been almost entirely replaced by bone, which broke under the force of her fall, leaving her head dangling grotesquely. Fortunately, her spinal cord was not damaged, and the immediate injuries, despite appearances, turned out to be relatively minor—at least, they would have been minor in anyone else. Her body's misguided attempts to heal her assorted bruises, breaks, and sprains transformed normal muscles and tendons into bone. Irregularly shaped new spurs of bone immobilized her back and made sitting for any extended period acutely uncomfortable. She lost all remaining motion in both hips and knees. Her ankles fused. More than a year later, in a delayed response, her jaw became involved.

One feature that marks victims of FOP, one that strikes everyone who meets them, is their ability to take the unbearable in stride. The first time I spoke to Nancy on the telephone, I asked her about this, and she said perhaps it is because FOP is so slow and predictable that people who have it can see challenges coming, prepare for them, outsmart them, and delight in the triumph.

Nonetheless, the abrupt and permanent loss of some abilities can be devastating. When Nancy's jaw became rigid, she wrote a list of things she could no longer do, such as eat anything but "slurped," or pureed, meals that looked like cat

food, brush the backs of her teeth or floss, stick her tongue out, yawn, cough effectively, lick envelopes and stamps, whistle, kiss, and lick her lips. She feared choking on food. Vomiting would be a nightmare. It bothered her that her young niece pretended that her dolls aspirated food and had to be suctioned.

When Nancy's body finally settled into its new shape, she went to the Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital, in Grand Rapids, to have her custom wheelchair modified. The International FOP Association had just gotten under way, and she was eager to find new members, so she asked the staff at the center to give her name and address to any other FOP patient who might pass through.

Andy Sando was an FOP patient who lived in St. Joseph, Michigan. He went to college, worked at odd jobs, tried to make it as a cartoonist, and then studied computer graphics and design. He lived independently with minimal help, and coped without a wheelchair until he injured his leg, in 1985. Even then he relied on a manual push chair only when necessary, and otherwise staunchly defied his handicap, insisting on walking even if it wore him out. In April of 1988, however, Andy conceded that he was needlessly limiting himself by refusing a power wheelchair. He went to Mary Free Bed, where the staff told him about Nancy Whitmore. He was mildly interested in the prospect of meeting someone else with FOP, he told me recently, but he was too busy with school and other things.

"Tell him the truth," Nancy piped in.

"Well," Andy confessed, "St. Joe is a small town compared with someplace like Philadelphia, but at least we have things to do. They told me there's this woman up in northern Michigan, in the north woods. I figured she was probably some frumpy old hick. Some lumberjack's daughter in a flannel shirt. All I remembered from a trip my family took up there when I was little was that the stores were full of moccasins. So I promptly forgot about Nancy."

Nancy, though, heard about Andy. She wrote, care of the rehabilitation center, inviting him to join the IFOPA. A week later, in August of 1988, Andy telephoned. They immediately realized that they shared many interests and values. They began writing and calling each other once, twice, six times a week. They decided to meet. In the second week of October, Andy and his mother drove up to northern Michigan.

Nancy and Andy met a few more times that fall. In December they were married. As they were pronounced man and wife, Andy's brother called, "Let's get him, boys!" and several of Andy's friends grabbed the rigid groom, picked him up, and tilted him sideways to kiss the bride. A photograph in the Sandos' wedding album shows Andy nearly horizontal, with a huge grin on his face.

The Sandos' house and circumstances are models of how the severely handicapped can live independently and with dignity. A legal settlement for Nancy's accident provided

money to modify the house she had shared with her sister's family, now occupied by her, Andy, and their caregivers. Her complete disability justified complete medical and personal care. The insurance company offered to pay for a nursing home. Nancy successfully argued in favor of being her own health-care provider, hiring and managing round-the-clock caregivers who would tend to her needs in her own home. Health-care economics being what they are now, both the company and Nancy got a good deal.

The Sandos call their house an "interconnected duplex." The nighttime caregiver occupies the original house, while the Sandos live in a new addition. Ramps lead to the front door and the back yard. To accommodate wheelchairs, the addition has few halls, and all doors but the front one are pocket doors that can be pushed open with one foot. The nucleus of the house is the Sandos' bedroom, or "the room of many doors," with access to both sides of the house and to the back garden. Two television sets let them watch the same program while lying in bed, despite their different body positions. The bathroom features a large hot tub to help ease the aches of FOP, with an electric hoist and a sling to maneuver them into the tub. "No one but me holds the control box when I'm in that lift," Nancy says. "I've learned."

Most of the house is one large, bright room, combining kitchen, living room, and Nancy's work space. Andy has his own small office. Each of their computers—a computer is one of the greatest boons to a person with FOP—is adjusted to its user's unique position. Kitchen counters are slightly raised, to accommodate Nancy when she stands. Light switches are low, at wheelchair height. The computers are wired to the wall switchplates, with bright red switches to distinguish them from the lights. The couple debated over floor coverings, and still are not quite happy. Most of the house is tiled, to bear the weight and friction of heavy electric wheelchairs. Elsewhere carpet lends warmth and dampens the hard acoustics. But one carpet has already been ruined by a wheelchair-battery leak—a housekeeping problem that most people don't have. For someone with FOP this house is the best of all possible worlds.

FOP AND HEREDITY

FOP was always assumed to be hereditary, though this belief was based on old, uncertain, largely anecdotal reports. Proof came when Kaplan learned of two American families, a father and child in Louisiana who had the disease, and an afflicted man in Georgia whose three children also had FOP. Another family turned up overseas. There are so few of these instances, however, because FOP patients rarely marry and have children. Most cases of the disease result from a mutation in a sperm or an egg cell which causes FOP only after it has been passed on to the next

generation. Modern techniques of genetic analysis are powerful tools for identifying genes that cause disease, but they require very large populations, which do not exist with FOP. So the next step in FOP research was to study the process by which bone is formed.

In the early 1960s Marshall Urist, an orthopedic surgeon and bone scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles, found that when demineralized bone—the essence of bone, without its calcium content—was implanted in a pouch of muscle, it induced that tissue to create a lump of bone. Urist was able to extract protein that retained this osteoinductive capacity, which he called "bone morphogenetic protein," or BMP, though he was unable to purify it completely using the technology available at the time.

More than twenty years later John Wozney and some colleagues at Genetics Institute, a Massachusetts biotechnology company, succeeded in purifying and sequencing four bone morphogenetic proteins from cow bone. In retrospect, Urist's difficulties were hardly surprising. BMP is a whole family of substances rather than a single entity (more than a dozen had been found by 1996), and each is present in the body in minute quantities. Wozney began with huge masses of raw cow bones, which were cleaned of their outer tissue and marrow and then pulverized. Forty kilograms of bone powder was treated with acid to dissolve away the calcium and other minerals that make up about 70 percent of bone's mass, leaving a rubbery residue of protein of various kinds. Ninety-five percent of this protein is collagen, which was discarded. The remainder was sorted according to protein size by gel electrophoresis, and each purified protein type was then laboriously tested in mice for its capacity to induce new bone growth. Wozney ended up with forty millionths of a gram, an invisible speck, of pure BMP.

When Zasloff saw Wozney's paper, in the December, 1988, issue of *Science* magazine, he showed it to Kaplan in great excitement. Zasloff had long suspected that Urist's elusive BMP might be implicated in FOP. No other known substance, after all, could produce new bone. But the most astonishing part of Wozney's paper was not that he'd been able to purify BMP. When a scientist identifies a new protein or gene sequence, he punches it into a computer database to learn whether it truly is new and whether it is similar, or homologous, to anything else. Homology provides important and sometimes unexpected clues to a molecule's function and evolutionary provenance. Sequences drift over time. All allow a certain amount of leeway, but crucial features cannot change without losing their function. Very important or fundamental sequences are generally held within strict bounds.

When Wozney looked for near matches to the BMP sequence, he found a strong similarity to the protein product of the decapentaplegic (*dpp*) gene. *Dpp* is not a human gene. It is found in *Drosophila melanogaster*, the fruit fly.

"My God, that's incredible!" Fred Kaplan says. "This amazing similarity of a human protein to a fly protein? How far back in evolution can we trace an ancestor common to a human being and a fly? Oh, about six hundred million years ago. The fact that the structure of any protein would be so highly conserved over that gulf in evolution suggests that this protein must be pretty important, and that nature can't tamper with it too much. But what does it do? Flies don't have bones. People don't have wings. What does this protein do in the fly?"

Zasloff and Kaplan called William Gelbart, a professor of cellular and developmental biology at Harvard University, the discoverer of and leading authority on dpp. He was coming to Philadelphia soon anyway, and a breakfast meeting was arranged at the White Dog Cafe, a popular Penn campus restaurant. Gelbart, Kaplan, Zasloff, and Jeff Tabas, the first FOP research fellow, sat down for coffee at 7:00 A.M. Just before 1:00, when Zasloff had to leave for a lecture, the waitress asked whether they cared to order lunch. These specialists in wildly different areas of science had been wholly absorbed, even incredulous, as they discovered a strangely suggestive, wholly impressionistic common ground.

FULL-SCALE WAR

LATE one evening in May of 1990, as Zasloff, Kaplan, and Tabas worked together in the lab, Zasloff suggested that they put together a meeting of doctors and scientists to discuss the work they had done. "Just a small group of people. A national symposium. No, we'll make it an international symposium." By the time the meeting actually took place, in late September of 1991, it was a large gathering of scientists and twenty-five FOP families. During a reception in the Egyptian Gallery of Penn's University Museum, Zasloff gazed at a stone statue and remarked that the mystery of FOP was no easier to solve than the riddle of the Sphinx. Yet at the close of the meeting one scientist was overheard telling another, "I think we just declared full-scale war on FOP."

The work moves more slowly than anyone would like, but in the few years since Zasloff and Kaplan met, around the same time that Jeannie Peeper founded the IFOPA, medical researchers have made important inroads. BMP is definitely involved in the disease, although it may not be the direct cause. Efforts to identify defects in the gene, or in genes that are upstream or downstream in a regulatory cascade, have thus far been in vain. How new bone forms in an embryonic pattern remains a tantalizing mystery.

Nonetheless, Kaplan's group recently found high concentrations of BMP in the lymphocytes of a large proportion of patients. This suggests an explanation for the tendency of injuries in FOP patients to heal as bone: the very cells that in normal repair swarm to the site to help in these

people may carry with them doses of BMP and turn everything into bone. Kaplan will soon begin studies with a novel family of drugs to see whether the process of cartilage and bone formation can be halted. Unexpectedly, the leading candidate is a substance that Zasloff discovered in a shark while exploring for antibiotics. It inhibits the formation of new blood vessels, a necessary first step in the creation of any new tissue. Of possible significance is that the shark skeleton consists entirely of cartilage, without any bone.

In 1988 Zasloff's FOP patients were turned away from the NIH. He was gratified and vindicated when, at the end of 1993, the NIH approved a large grant for Fred Kaplan's work on the role of BMP. Grant reviewers gave the proposal a very high score, concluding that the hypothesis was

"one of the most original and interesting ideas" in the field.

FOP and its problems lie at the crossroads of several seemingly unrelated disciplines. Answers to questions that FOP poses will also address grander issues of how the body first creates its shape and then knows where to stop, how tissues decide to become what they are, and why they don't turn into something else.

I have repeatedly found myself thinking of the word "heroic" in connection with FOP patients and their families. I wondered whether I had friends or relatives who would be so generous, whether I myself possessed the greatness of spirit to do as much for others as they do. I wondered why I thought of this as heroic. Being the random targets of a genetic defect should neither ennoble nor diminish these people. Malvolio's refrain in *Twelfth Night* ran through my mind: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." Perhaps many of us have the capacity for heroism, but few are called to show it. Those with FOP have had heroism thrust upon them. ☾

Sufferers may end up fused in a standing position. Otherwise they are healthy, and with today's improved nutrition and medical care can live to ripe old age. They are normal people trapped in personal prisons.



Not Singing Too Much

*A vocal performance by the pianist
and songwriter Dave Frishberg is more like a
series of witty asides*

THE pianist and singer Dave Frishberg once introduced his song "The Dear Departed Past" by explaining that it was written from the point of view of "a guy very much like myself, very much hung up on the old ways and the old days—pathologically hung up, I guess —[who] also happens to be, like myself, a sports-trivia enthusiast." In the lyrics Frishberg wonders, "Can one feel a real nostalgia for a time and place one never even knew?" For the sixty-four-year-old Frishberg, who writes both words and music, the answer is yes. Many of his lyrics satirize contem-

porary foibles, including the propensity of many successful people to take themselves much too seriously ("I'm impressed with my attorney Bernie," begins a Frishberg song that marvels at the aplomb of a fellow who is quite impressed with himself).

by Francis Davis

But in one song Frishberg offers cautionary advice to the dissolute cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, who died of infirmities brought on by alcoholism in 1931, two years before Frishberg's birth; in another he raises a cheer for the dead-ball-era pitcher Christy Mathewson, who hung up his glove in 1916.

A throwback to the days when jazz instrumentalists who wrote music were songwriters rather than composers, Frishberg is also something of a throwback as a pianist, without being a musical revivalist. Although his ambition as a teenager in St. Paul, Minnesota, was to go to New York or Los Angeles and become a bebop pianist, his formative influences included such blues and boogie-woogie men as Jay McShann, Pete Johnson, and Albert Ammons. And despite cracking one of modern jazz's many inner circles by becoming the pianist in a quintet under the joint leadership of the tenor saxophonists Al Cohn and Zoot Sims in 1963, several years after arriving in New York, Frishberg also found himself in demand among swing musicians—if for no other reason than that he was one of a handful of younger pianists familiar with their repertoire.

A typical Frishberg vocal is a series of witty asides, delivered in a small, reedy tenor at once tenacious and unassuming—not a singer's voice, as Frishberg would be the first to admit, but that of a songwriter and pianist overcoming his inhibitions and giving a lyric his best shot.

As a singer, he is the very definition of an acquired taste. He took up singing nearly thirty years ago, because the Paul Ankas and Steve Lawrences for whom he imagined he was writing hits refused to give him a nibble. Blossom Dearie, also a songwriter, a pianist, and a conversational singer, was the first to recognize the potential of Frishberg's songs. In recent years his tunes have been performed by many jazz and cabaret singers, including Rosemary Clooney, who dedicated Frishberg's road-weary lament "Sweet Kentucky Ham" to President Bill Clinton when she sang it at a jazz festival on the White House lawn in 1993. Frishberg affectionately refers to most of the others who have recorded his songs (and, by extension, to himself) as "cult" singers—"cult" being an accounting term, I guess.

He says that when he listens to other singers performing his songs, he sometimes thinks, "I wish they wouldn't sing so much." This is a wish unlikely ever to be made about Frishberg. An arranger hoping to orchestrate one of his songs once accused him of singing in too "confidential" a key. "Singers like to hear their voices," Frishberg says, "and they get caught up in the sounds they're making, bending notes and all of that. But because I'm usually writing for myself, I very seldom write anything that's vocally challenging. A lot of them I like to deliver out of tempo, as conversation. And when I hear them stretched out into long, songy lines . . . it works, I guess, but I get impatient, because I want people to be able to concentrate on the words. Somebody once asked me if I wanted to submit some songs to a certain singer, a big Broadway star, and I answered, without trying to be funny, that I didn't think I had anything that loud."

ONE of Frishberg's most recorded songs is a ballad called "Heart's Desire," for which he wrote only the lyrics. (The melody, which has a musing quality that makes it ideal for a pianist, is by Alan Broadbent, a former Woody Herman sideman and arranger who is now the pianist in Charlie Haden's Quartet West.) The song that has earned Frishberg the most in royalties over the years, however, is one that neither he nor any of his usual interpreters has ever recorded. Written in 1974 on assignment for the Saturday-morning TV series *School-*

house Rock, and still in the show's rotation, sung by Frishberg's friend Jack Sheldon, "I'm Just a Bill" follows a bill through Congress on its way to becoming a piece of legislation. In addition to easing some of Frishberg's financial anxieties, the ditty has made him a hero to his sons, Harry and Max, twelve and ten.

"In my kids' world, my credential is that I wrote 'I'm Just a Bill,'" Frishberg said when I called on him at home in the hills of Portland, Oregon, last year. The song has given his sons, who live not far away with their mother, Frishberg's ex-wife, something to boast about to their schoolmates. According to Frishberg, even his boys' teachers are impressed. This could be because Frishberg's song is one of only a few from the series that fulfill their educational mission (Strunk and White themselves might have had trouble following Bob Dorough's "Busy Prepositions" and "Conjunction Junction"), though a likelier explanation is that plenty of today's younger teachers grew up with it. It's their musical comfort food—the song that their contemporary Winona Ryder in effect pigs out on after breaking up with her boyfriend in the pandering 1994 movie *Reality Bites*.

Frishberg has accurately described the rest of his songs as being "for adults, or at least for people who wouldn't mind growing up." "Heart's Desire" is more typical of his work, though it, too, is a kind of children's song; it was written soon after Frishberg's divorce, and is an attempt to pass along some fatherly advice to his boys. At face value, Frishberg's lyric is about the importance of heeding what you perceive to be your calling—your heart's desire. As he sings it, however, the focus of the lyric shifts from these words of wisdom to their giver, a man whose own heart's desire is not just the love but the future happiness of the person or people he's addressing. As featured on his album *Where You At?* (Sterling S1005-2), "Heart's Desire" is one of very few songs on which Frishberg, who usually has just as much voice as he needs to sing his songs, gives evidence of straining, perhaps because Broadbent's melody goes a little high for him. Or perhaps it's because this is the place to strain.

In his stage banter and private conversation as well as in his lyrics, Frishberg has a way with a quip that is often the

Oh, the Possibilities!



There are so many possible choices to fill your cup. A can of pre-ground coffee? A well-aged bag of beans from supermarket shelves? Perhaps some indifferently roasted beans whose potential has been squandered along the way? *Don't do it!* Don't waste time and money on coffee that leaves your palate cold.

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public face of mild depression. I once heard him tell an audience that Minnesota Public Radio had asked him during the 1992 presidential election to write a song about the ailing economy. At first he refused, not thinking himself a topical songwriter. When the network said that it was really after a song about "hopelessness and despair," Frishberg said, "You've come to the right guy." He wrote a dystopian anthem called "My Country Used to Be." About an early effort called "Another Song About Paris," Frishberg once commented in a liner note, "I wrote it for a specific character to sing—a dyspeptic, bad-tempered American. Imagine my surprise when, with the passing of years, the character turned out to be me."

IF not for the CD-ROM speakers under his worktable and the view of a forest over his piano, the main room of Frishberg's home could be a stage set for "The Dear Departed Past." In addition to a random selection of baseball and football annuals from the 1930s and 1940s, his sports memorabilia include an autographed copy of a Christy Mathewson baseball novel for boys; Frishberg believes that the book once belonged to Hal Chase, a first baseman of Mathewson's era who left the major leagues under suspicion of throwing games. He also owns first editions of Robert Benchley and Ring Lardner, and a wall of cassettes and framed photographs is practically a shrine to Al Cohn and Zoot Sims.

My visit to Frishberg's home was more on the order of a continuing conversation than an interview. I had first met him about eight years earlier, in a used-record store in London, where we chatted over coffee after I beat him to a copy of Cohn's *Mr. Music*. I think we next talked in New York a few years later, between his sets in a jazz club on Union Square; the maitre d' interrupted us at one point to tell Frishberg that "Vegas is calling you, Dave." "About time," Frishberg exclaimed, without missing a beat. (The call turned out to be from the wife of a musician he once knew; she wanted Frishberg's help in lining up gigs for her son, a trombonist determined to try his luck in New York.) Frishberg and I also once talked after his show at a midtown-Manhattan cabaret, around the same time that he made an appearance on the radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*. Seeing the nostal-

gic faces of the locals all around me as he sang his evocative "Do You Miss New York?," written several years after he switched coasts, in 1971, I realized that the New York they clung to had become a city one no longer needed to leave in order to miss—as imaginary a place as Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon.

No doubt thinking of this song's passing reference to *Annie Hall*, and the passing resemblance Frishberg bears to its star and director (beaky, bespectacled, and balding), a British journalist once proclaimed him "a Woody Allen of song." This quotation still sometimes shows up in Frishberg's press releases, but it doesn't capture him. For one thing, Frishberg's background is closer to that of Diane Keaton's title character than to that of Allen's Alvy Singer. Culturally he seems more midwestern than Jewish. When explaining to audiences the sort of man who is singing "The Dear Departed Past," he pronounces "enthusiast" with the stress on the final syllable; he may be the only person I know who, when someone passes along a bit of incredible information, responds with a comic-book exclamation very much like "Pshew!" His singing, too, is midwestern in character, and this could be what people have in mind when they liken him to the Indiana-born songwriter Hoagy Carmichael. But even Carmichael had greater vocal range.

"Singer-songwriter" is a designation as common in pop as it is uncommon in jazz, and because so many of today's pop songwriters refer to their own experiences in their songs, people assume that Frishberg must be speaking personally too. But he often writes in character—or, as he puts it, "Every song I write seems to have a little character in my head singing it, and it's often not me. And this to me is an aid in writing. I can give myself a point of view that isn't the same nagging, neurotic point of view. Or if it is, at least it's somebody else talking."

More than Frishberg himself, the characters to whom he sometimes yields the floor are familiar types from Allen's films. One of his cleverest up-tempo patter songs, in the same vein as "My Attorney Bernie," is "Quality Time," in which a yuppie dealmaker proposes a romantic idyll to his fast-track wife, though he is apparently unable to imagine even an amorous getaway without power lunches and access to a laptop fax.

*I know a small hotel, remote
and quiet.*

*If they decide to sell, my firm could
buy it.*

*Then we'd develop it and gentrify it.
We're talkin' quality time. . . .*

One of Frishberg's heroes was Frank Loesser, whose scores include *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and who once advised Frishberg that song lyrics were not poetry but a form of journalism. This must have come as good news, given that Frishberg had majored in journalism at the University of Minnesota and had contributed first-person-plural "Talk of the Town"—like pieces to a campus literary magazine. Frishberg likes to say that as a lyricist he is still a kind of journalist. But because he writes in so many different voices, his *modus operandi* is more like that of a novelist or a playwright. The whole time he was writing "Quality Time," he once told an audience, "I kept asking myself, 'Who is this jerk?' Then I realized—it's Bernie."

"I HEARD something funny the other day," Frishberg said in response to one of my questions about his affinity for times gone by. "Somebody asks a guy, 'Where are you living these days?' And he says, 'In the past.' At times I wonder if we don't subconsciously borrow our parents' expectations about life and refer back to the things that touched them when they were young." Gesturing toward his books, he added, "Because that's what I sometimes refer back to—a period when I wasn't even alive."

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be, as the cliché goes; it has become politically incorrect. Once regarded as a harmless expression of alienation or a common side effect of growing older, a belief that life used to be better is now taken by an increasing number of social commentators to be a rejection of the creed of multiculturalism—a pacified form of white male rage. Frishberg leaves himself open to such charges. In the inverted world of jazz, white musicians are often the ones nursing racial grievances, and Frishberg remembers getting the cold shoulder from some black musicians in New York in the 1960s, during the stormiest days of the black-power movement. "Archie Shepp was, I think, the first guy to challenge me directly about being white, and I was tak-

en completely unawares by this. My feelings were hurt from that standpoint, because I thought that the fact that we both knew how to play 'Groovin' High' was enough to make us some sort of brothers. And at the same time this was going on, I was losing interest in jazz as a genre, maybe because I felt excluded in a way that seemed kind of arbitrary. The music was changing in character, and I didn't really feel comfortable affecting a menacing posture as a jazz musician."

In his defense, Frishberg's is a nostalgia largely without memory, and it is close to becoming a universal condition. In 1947 the poet Parker Tyler, who was both his era's most probing film critic and its most Freudian, wrote that the "psycho-analytic trend in movies," as represented by dream sequences in such films as *Spellbound* and *Lady in the Dark*, had the potential to transform the unconscious into "a place." Along with television and photographs, movies have similarly transformed the past, making it a visible part of the present that is different from the rest of our world only in not including us. Just as Frishberg isn't alone—or necessarily mistaken—in believing that yesterday was more civil, he isn't unique in lamenting that time has too great a head start on him. This is what collecting tends to be about, and it is also the *raison d'être* for American Movie Classics and Nick at Nite. It's what makes "The Dear Departed Past" a song about looking back in longing, not in anger, and what accounts for its unexpected power.

PORTLAND seems like the perfect headquarters for a man awash in memories real and imagined. Its downtown looks stylish rather than derelict because of the many older buildings still in use, including a restored movie palace that now houses the symphony, and a luxury hotel, the Heathman. Until last year Frishberg accompanied the singer Rebecca Kilgore in the hotel bar two nights a week. Frishberg moved here from Los Angeles in 1986, thinking that Portland would be a better place to raise his boys, and he stayed on to be near them after the divorce. His reason for going to the West Coast in the first place was to take a job as a songwriter for a TV comedy hour called *The Funny Side*, a vehicle for Gene Kelly that was canceled after half a season in 1971. Frish-

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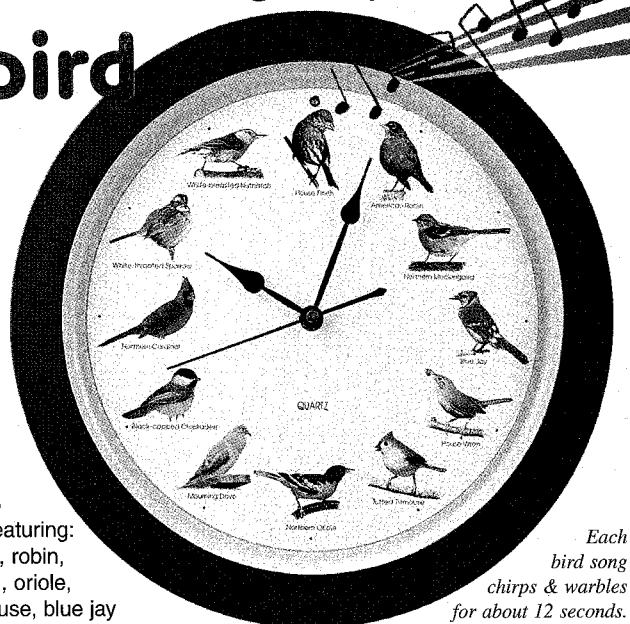
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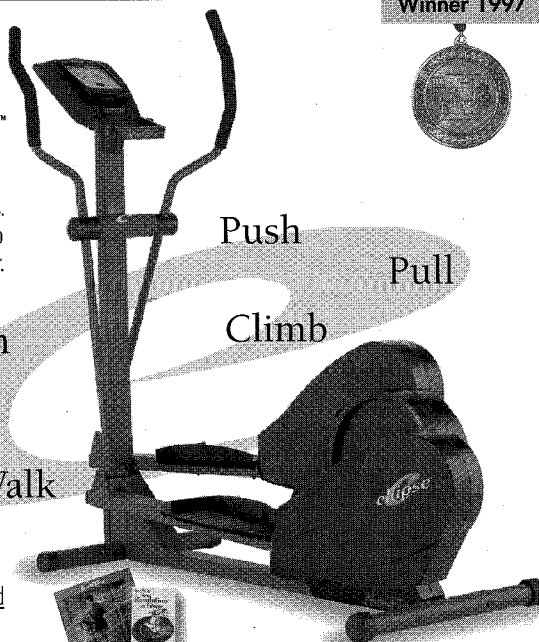
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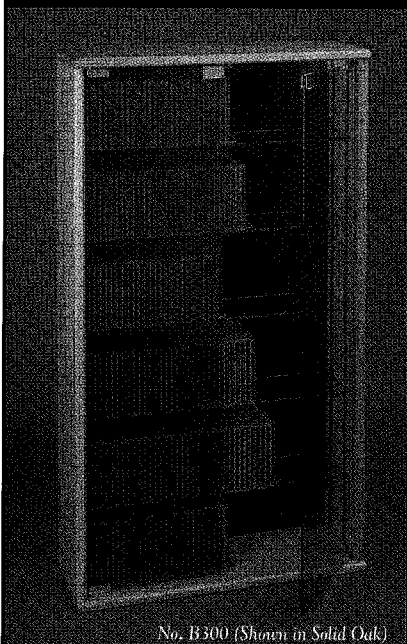
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berg recalls that the first song he wrote for Kelly—"Save Us From Sunday," about the things that can go wrong on Sundays—gave Kelly problems, because it required him to begin singing between beats. "Jack Elliott, the music director, says to me, 'You gotta learn to write simpler.' I said, 'Simpler? What could be simpler than an eighth-note rest? I thought Gene Kelly was musical.' And Jack said, 'He is, from the ankles down.'"

Luckily for Frishberg, Portland brought the unaffected Kilgore his way. Her taste in songs, like his, runs to worthy items from the 1930s and 1940s that haven't been done to death by others (such as Cole Porter's "Looking at You," which is on Kilgore and Frishberg's album *Looking at You*, PHD Music PHD 1004-CD, and Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane's "An Occasional Man," which she recorded for the more recent *Not a Care in the World*, Arbors Jazz ARCD 19169). A surprise for me, when I heard the two on their final night at the Heathman, was that Kilgore didn't sing any of Frishberg's songs, and he didn't sing at all. Nor, he told me, would he be singing or featuring any of his own numbers while subbing that weekend for another pianist in the piano bar of a hotel closer to the waterfront. "I need a place to be a pianist," he explained. "If you start to sing here, especially your own songs, right away you're an 'act' and you don't get called for other gigs. That's what had started to happen in L.A., and I couldn't afford to let it happen in Portland."

The song Frishberg was writing when I visited him is called "I Want to Be a Sideman," and this time the identity of the "little character" with a claim to Frishberg's ear is no mystery. Frishberg told me that when not performing his own songs, he not only doesn't mind a noisy room like the Heathman bar but actually prefers one. "Sometimes it's good to feel that you're not under a microscope, with everyone waiting for your next note. Several musicians I know have said that to me, and we've agreed: 'Gee, I wish they'd talk among themselves so that I could loosen up a little bit.'"

It's another story when Frishberg sings. "I want their attention so bad," he said. "I don't want them to miss a single word." This reminded me of something he had said earlier, in talking about advice he received from Frank Loesser. "I remem-

ber him going over one of my lyrics and telling me, 'Now, there's a colorful word, but do you really want it where it'll get lost in that jumble of notes? Put it near a rest.' He cautioned me against using what he called 'colorful' words where they might draw so much attention to themselves that they would prevent the listener from absorbing what was coming next."

Frishberg seems to have taken Loeser's words to heart not just as a lyricist but as a self-accompanist. "I think I play a lot less for myself than I do behind other singers," he told me. "I sometimes fear that I can be a rather intrusive accompanist. I tend to play too much, to try to inject my own personality, because I'm basically a piano stylist, as opposed to an all-rounder. I know I'm a better accompanist for myself than I am for anybody else, because I know where in the lyric it's better for me to let my hands be quiet, to draw attention to the words."

Frishberg is correct in thinking of himself as two different pianists. One is the unencumbered orchestra-in-miniature who can be heard to ideal advantage on his 1989 recording of Duke Ellington's "The Mooche," from *Let's Eat Home* (Concord Jazz CCD-4402). This is also the pianist who demonstrates his bebop expertise in a series of duets with the Portland-area-based alto saxophonist Warren Rand on *Dameron II-V* (Aspen Grove AC CD 001), Rand's tribute to the bebop composer Tadd Dameron. The other pianist lurking in Frishberg is the epigrammatist who takes over the bench behind Frishberg's vocals. The album on which these two most happily coexist is *Where You At?*, recorded in Paris in 1991. This is an atypical effort for Frishberg in that it features him singing a few songs he did not write, and he does a very likable job of phrasing them. They include Johnny Mercer's "Harlem Butterfly" and "I'm an Old Cowhand," and Walter Bullock and Allie Wrubel's "The You and Me That Used to Be," a wonderful song from the 1930s about the "old days" that was the title track of a classic LP Frishberg arranged for Jimmy Rushing in 1971. *Where You At?* also has going for it the definitive reading of "Heart's Desire," featuring an exquisitely wounded-sounding solo by the expatriate trombonist Glenn Ferris. The best recorded version of "The Dear Departed Past" is the one on Frishberg's 1984 solo album *Live at Vine*

Street (Fantasy OJCCD-832-2). A more recent version is on *Quality Time* (Sterling S1006-2), from 1993, but here Frishberg, in his capacity as producer, undermines himself by adding a rhythm section and horns. "The Dear Departed Past" is a song about a man alone with his own thoughts, and it should sound that way.

EVEN so, *Quality Time* is worth seeking out for a blissful and fairly new Frishberg song called "Snowbound" and for the devastatingly funny title tune. A good selection of Frishberg's earlier numbers, including "Sweet Kentucky Ham," "Do You Miss New York?," and "My Attorney Bernie," can be found on *Classics* (Concord Jazz CCD-4462), a reissue of recordings from the early 1980s. "I Want to Be a Sideman" is one of four vocal performances on the new *Dave Frishberg by Himself* (Arbors Jazz ARCD-19185), an album featuring Frishberg the expansive solo pianist.

The reason Frishberg has never gotten around to recording "I'm Just a Bill" could be that he's content to let everyone else sing it. He performs the song in concert upon request, but requests for it aren't all that common. Few people in Frishberg's age group have ever paid attention to "I'm Just a Bill," much less associate it with him. But the song does have a way of following him around, as he told Terry Gross, of the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air*, in a story about visiting a friend in the hospital.

"I went to his room and he was sharing it with somebody else who must have been really sick, because there was this big screen. Behind the screen this other patient was ghostly pale and he had tubes sticking out of every orifice. Looked like he was on his way out. So, I was talking to my friend and my friend said, 'What have you been doing?' I said, 'Well, I'm working for *Schoolhouse Rock* again.' He said, 'Gee, that thing you wrote years ago, "I'm Just a Bill"—I still hear that.' And from behind the screen came the voice of this other patient. He said, 'Did you write "I'm Just a Bill?"' . . . And then from behind the screen he began to sing it. The dying man singing my song with what sounded like his last breath: 'I'm just a bill, from Capitol Hill . . .'

"I kept saying, 'You're singing too much,'" Frishberg said, embellishing a little. "'Do it conversationally.'" ☼

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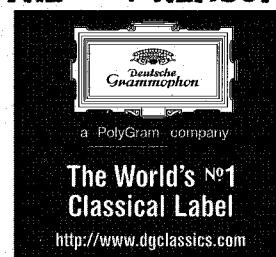
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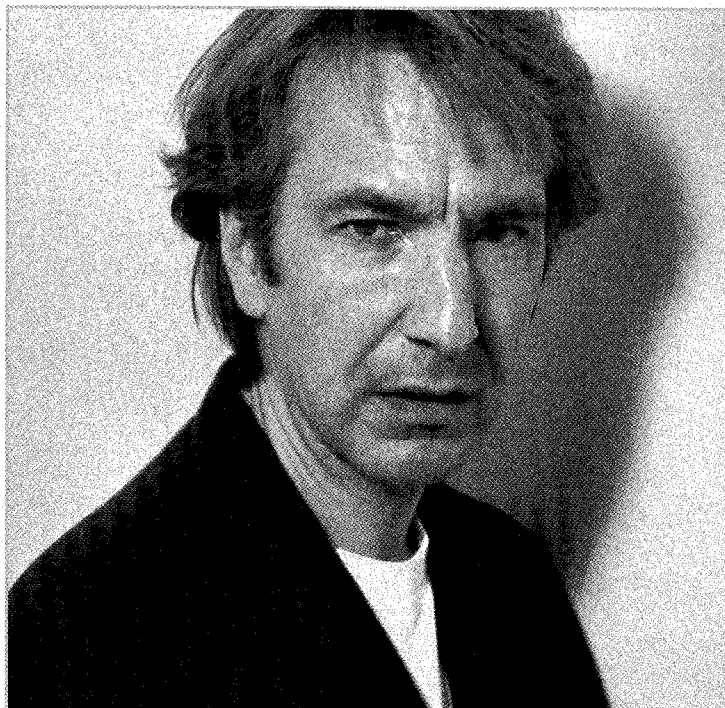
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A Star-Making Performance

Mesmer, the story of an eighteenth-century healer, still doesn't have a U.S. distributor. But Alan Rickman's acting in the title role is inspired

THE late Dennis Potter (*Pennies From Heaven*, *The Singing Detective*) was something of an artistic specialist in nasty ironies, so it makes a bitter kind of sense that *Mesmer*, the movie of the last of his screenplays to be produced before he died, should be the victim of one. The lead, Alan Rickman, gives the star-making performance to blanch out once and for all his reputation as primarily a great screen villain (the elegant terrorist in *Die Hard*, the lethally tantrummy Sheriff of Nottingham in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*). The director, Roger Spottiswoode, has achieved Hollywood com-

mercial coronation with the latest James Bond movie, but *Mesmer* is arguably his greatest film. The screenplay is a far finer memorial to Potter than the two teleplays *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus* (shown here on cable last June), which, knowing he was dying as he wrote them, he intended to stand as his epitaph. But you can't see the film in this country.

Or in Potter, Rickman, and Spottiswoode's home country of England, or, indeed, anywhere except in Canada, where it won Rickman the Best Actor prize when it was screened at the 1994 Montreal Film Festival. Legal squabbles over the finished film have held up its dis-

tribution elsewhere and ensured that this hermetic, difficult, willfully underdramatized and peculiarly brilliant movie—a masterpiece in its way—remains almost unknown. Surely some innovative U.S. distributor can be persuaded to free *Mesmer* from its Canadian captivity. If the intrinsic merit of the film is not argument enough for it, then the performance turned in by Alan Rickman, an actor with a big small public, should allay qualms about ticket sales, at least in U.S. art houses.

Potter died, in 1994, of pancreatic cancer (in his last television interview he swigged liquid morphine from a flask), but the disease that tormented, humiliated, and defined him was psoriatic arthropathy. Potter fans will be familiar with this unsavory combination of flaking skin and aching joints from *The Singing Detective*, to whose novelist hero Potter gave the same symptoms. When he wasn't having hallucinations in which his doctors and acquaintances lip-synced to popular songs from the past, Marlow (Michael Gambon) lay in his hospital-ward bed, spiteful and ashamed, and spit bile at the world.

The Singing Detective had a Freudian happy ending, and *Mesmer* has a Freudian unhappy ending, but that's about all that links them. Even among Potter's odd later works *Mesmer* is an oddity. It's set in the eighteenth century rather than the grungy present; its hero is an aristocrat (if only by marriage) and a doctor rather than a patient; there's almost no humor, black or otherwise; nobody bursts into song. Still, we hear the voice of Marlow, and of Daniel Feeld (Albert Finney plays, in what must be a deliberate mordant pun, Potter's Feeld) from *Karaoke*, and of Potter himself, when *Mesmer* muses on "our inner rage at sickness."

The historical Franz Anton Mesmer appears to have been one of those intriguing premodern types that were half crank and half genius. (Newton, when he wasn't working out the laws of physical reality, practiced alchemy.) He thought he had found in the body a mysterious magnetic force that could be rebalanced from illness to health, and in fact he may have been on to something: recent medical research indicates that in

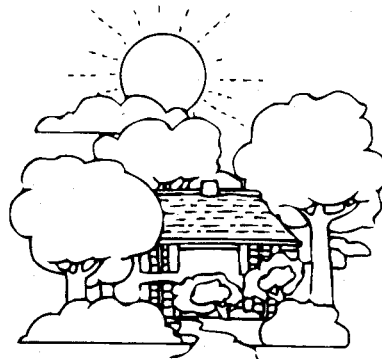
some cases magnets can relieve pain in post-polio patients. But he is credited with discovering the use of hypnotism as a therapeutic tool. Where his contemporaries purged and leeched, he played the glass harmonica (actually a keyboard instrument with water jars instead of strings) to soothe his patients, murmured suggestions to them, stroked their auras. Apparently he had both the commanding personality and the hypnotic talent to effect at least some temporary psychological change. Mesmer was histrionic, vain, and given to braggadocio, but he seems never to have been a complete fraud. (An examining panel that included Benjamin Franklin concluded that "some great force acts upon and masters the patients [and] appears to reside in the magnetiser.") To his peers in the medical establishment, however, Mesmer was an opportunist and a fake, and they got him thrown out of Vienna. Fetching up at the court of Louis XVI, he not only kept his head through the French Revolution but finished out his days on a pension from Napoleon.

This wily survivor is not the man Potter was interested in. He wanted to tell the story of an innovative genius misunderstood and persecuted. This is an old story, much beloved of Hollywood, and *Mesmer* would be trivial, familiar stuff if Potter, Spottiswoode, and Rickman didn't keep turning the clichés inside out. On the surface *Mesmer* is about its scorned hero's cure of a beautiful young woman (Amanda Ooms) who has been blind for fifteen years. Her father, it turns out, has been sexually assaulting her, but Mesmer works what can only, in spite of its discretion, be called an erotic cure—talking caressingly to her and even stroking her—and her sight returns. She just hadn't *wanted* to see!

At this point moviegoers may find themselves thinking of John Huston's *Freud*, in which Montgomery Clift, eyes popping with the strain of looking for the truth, struggles against the prejudices of a later Vienna. *Freud* is a formulaic triumph tale: the pioneering psychoanalyst wins in the end because truth is on his side—and not only truth but science. Oddly, in view of his reputation, Freud is held up in the movie as a champion of the scientific method. He is superior to his fellows because he has the courage to follow the evidence wherever it leads,

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whereas they fall by the wayside, struck down by their own prejudices and fears. *Mesmer* stands the formula on its head. The audience is still meant to be on the hero's side (we're cued by the fact that Mesmer is the only doctor in the film who shows any compassion for suffering). But now science and rationality are the enemies.

THE past few years have seen the release of two other films that deal with medicine in the eighteenth century, Kenneth Branagh's remake of *Frankenstein* and the Alan Bennett-scripted *The Madness of King George*. With *Mesmer* they form a sort of AIDS-era trilogy about purging and bloodshed and awful experiments that torture where they're meant to cure. (Eighteenth-century medical practices were so horrific that one book on the subject is titled *The Age of Agony*.) The 1931 (still the best) *Frankenstein* movie came out of a reaction against the First World War—the frightful battlefield mutilations that, with improved surgical techniques, men now survived; the sense that technology had betrayed society; outrage at the carnage to which the smug social and political ideas of the nineteenth century had led. Like the rulers of Europe, Dr. Frankenstein wanted to play God—and the moviemakers punished him for it (in the film's original ending the monster killed him). But in the 1994 film Branagh's doctor is a Promethean figure, willing to go to any lengths to ease suffering, though in spite of his idealism, he destroys what he means to help. *The Madness of King George* takes the patient's point of view rather than the doctor's, as the poor, gentle King is tormented by a bunch of quacks who not only have no idea what his illness is (it is now thought to have been porphyria rather than psychosis) but have a fine old time subjecting his body to various painful humiliations. Bennett's script is strange, with a creepy sadomasochistic undercurrent. But it speaks to anyone who has ever thought his doctor was a fool.

Potter must have been at the top of that list. There is something particularly humiliating about a persistent disease that not only lacks the decency to kill the patient but has embarrassing symptoms as well. Any illness strips away dignity, but a nonfatal, messy one finally denies the

sufferer any sympathy. He becomes a bore. His doctor is the only person he can possibly hope to talk frankly to, and all the doctor does is come up with one remedy after another that doesn't work.

To the patient, his sickness is a narrative—it has a beginning, a middle, and (he hopes) an end; recurring characters; moral tests; mood and suspense; mystery and drama. Unfortunately, this rich story is incommunicable. Doctors and friends who ask to hear it aren't quite able to; they make up their own stories in its place. In the end illness is a secret that will not be told. Not for nothing did Virginia Woolf call her (psychological) disease “the dumb horror.”

SPOTTISWOODE and his production designer, Jan Schlubach, create a subtly unsettling eighteenth century. It takes a while to figure out, among all the sumptuous clothes and huge, beautiful houses, exactly what is striking the wrong note. Finally you realize it's that nearly all the interiors seem stained—walls are dirty white, wan gold, body-fluid yellow. Everything's the color of old, soiled bandages, and the light in the high-ceilinged rooms is muted, as if by some miasma. The whole civilization is diseased. There are very few bright colors in *Mesmer*, and these are almost always the natural green of leaves or lawns. In one of our first views of Mesmer, he is scurrying along in a little garden maze of dark-green boxwood, struggling to explain his theories to an indifferent fellow physician.

“Superstition and religious enthusiasm have been purged from the Queen of Sciences,” his associate tells Mesmer. Mesmer pouts; he sighs; he rallies round and insists grandly, “I have made a discovery that will lift pain, misery, and disharmony from our burdened frames.” Rickman is always a strong screen presence, but he's hard to classify. You can relegate most actors either to the string section or to the brass, but Rickman somehow combines a dark, sonorous tone with something haunting and far-away, as if he'd mixed a cello with a French horn. His specialty is fusing opposing traits: he's mannered yet honest, too much yet reserved, bored and curious, high-strung and animal-still. This sort of complexity isn't always useful to an actor, but it's invaluable in roles that

call for genius or mysticism. And certainly Rickman has all the equipment required to play Mesmer: charisma, intelligence, sensuality, pride, and what one critic called “the face of a Magus”—anachronistic features that make him look at home in an earlier century. (He made his reputation in a play with an eighteenth-century setting, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.)

Rickman has spent the bulk of his movie career being brilliant in supporting parts that don't need brilliance; he must have realized the opportunity he had in the role of Mesmer, because he tears into it. He's not just brilliant here; he's great, bold to the point of folly: the performance constantly—breathtakingly—flirts with the overwrought and the ludicrous. Rickman keeps making outrageous choices and forcing the audience to believe them through sheer force of personality. And yet, beneath the arrogance and theatricality there's something artistically modest, almost shy. The purpose of acting isn't display but to “give it away,” Rickman once told an interviewer. “Throw it to the audience. Catch!” This generosity edges his extremes with grace and makes them work.

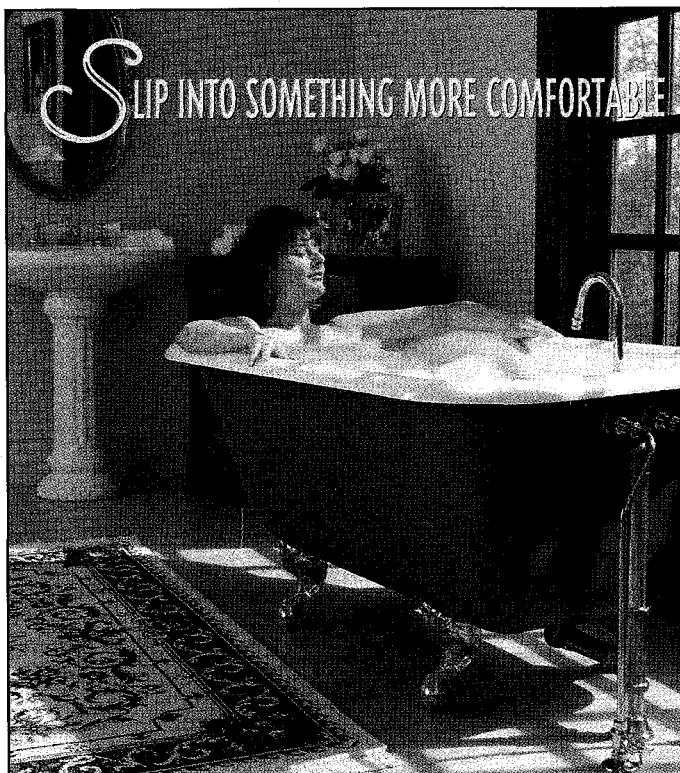
In some ways the genius-charlatan-shaman Mesmer is similar to the role of Rasputin, for which Rickman won an Emmy in 1996. But Rasputin was a primitive, and Rickman wasn't able to use one of his most valuable assets, his feral wit. He doesn't use it enough in *Mesmer* either, actually (he really should get the chance to do more comedy), but at least he gets to demonstrate the confusion that can assail a man of sophisticated intelligence. He keeps flipping the character over, from sardonic superiority to clumsy bewilderment, from pompous dramatizing to defeated weariness, from the showy to the withdrawn. Mesmer is never able to settle into one attitude, because wherever he finds himself, the key to ending suffering is somewhere else. He often appears to be listening, as if trying to discern beneath the racket of the commonplace some melody that sings of health.

This Mesmer—the creature of Potter and Spottiswoode as well as of Rickman—is an intuitive groping through a world of barren rationality. It's easy to get soft-minded about this approach to medicine and end up in some New Age intellectual spa where feeling is every-

thing and only the quacks survive. But the movie undercuts its own sentimentality. As written, Mesmer fails at everything, even being a scam artist, and Rickman and Spottiswoode have given the character a painful, thwarted quality. He has some sense of the truth, but he's living in a culture that provides no way to tell it except the suspect language of the mountebank or the mystic. Rickman is an almost fiendishly articulate actor, but he convinces you that fundamentally, where it most matters to him, Mesmer is without words.

IN one scene an unsympathetic Mesmer is engaged to cure a young aristocrat: when the man opens his mouth, he reveals that his problem is that he has a voice like a Munchkin. Mesmer is simultaneously Oz the Great and Terrible and the little man behind the curtain, half doubting his own tricks, half believing they're not tricks. Rickman handles this aspect of the character so subtly that it's almost impossible to tell what Mesmer actually thinks of himself. As originally released, the movie contained a scene that answered the question: we saw the boy Mesmer alone on top of a crag, his ear pressed to the earth, listening as if it were possible to eavesdrop on the secrets of the universe. Those familiar with Potter's work will recognize the image as a twin of the scene in *The Singing Detective* in which the young Marlow sits high up in a tree in an Edenic forest, just about to spy in the distance his adulterous mother and her lover, and tumble into the world of sin. In their wisdom, the editors of the video version of *Mesmer* have removed this scene (you get a passing glimpse of the boy), and along with it a good chunk of the film's comprehensibility.

This stupidity probably wouldn't have surprised Potter. As a screenwriter, he must have learned that even if he succeeded in getting his story on paper in a way that bore some connection to how he imagined it, he still had to watch out that no one "improved" it into being even further away from what he wanted to say. But the director of this movie is on Potter's side. Spottiswoode has understood that Mesmer is both Potter the artist and Potter the patient, the man struggling to tell a story, whose art is finally his illness, and whose illness is art. ☞



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A Thriller With Something on Its Mind

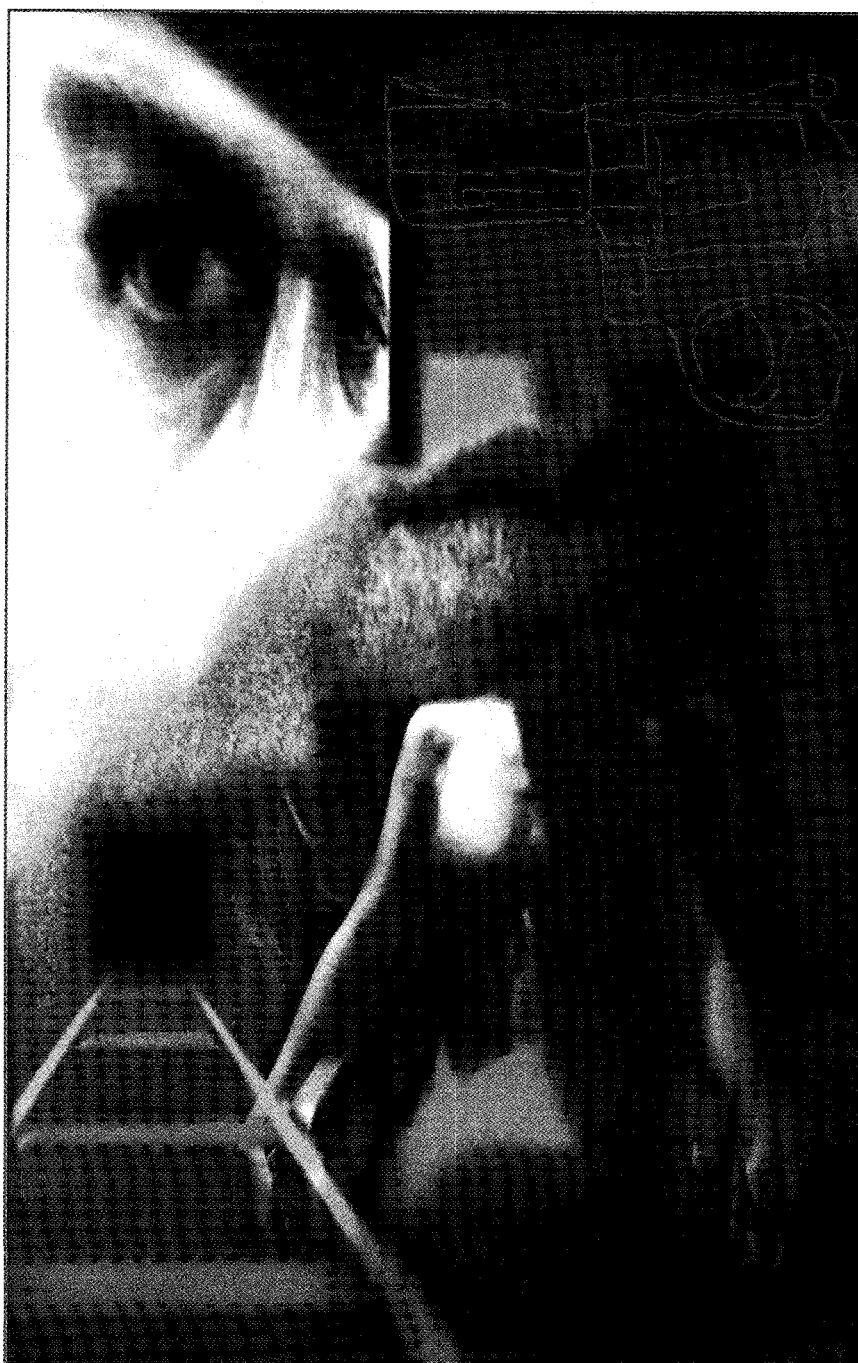
*It tends to get lost in discussions of his teeth, but Martin Amis
is teetering on the edge of profundity*

by Frank Kermode

NIGHT TRAIN

by Martin Amis.
Harmony Books, 181 pages,
\$20.00.

REVIEWS ought to be of books, not authors, but in some cases the distinction is more easily stated than sustained. An author can be famous for a fastidious avoidance of publicity, like Thomas Pynchon, or for courting it, like Norman Mailer. It must be close to impossible to read the books of either without thinking of the personalities projected, silently or noisily, by the men themselves, their publicists, and the media generally. Of course, there are hundreds of novels by authors who aren't famous in this way, but they and their publishers almost certainly wish they were. The energetic or mysterious public images of the writers are reflected back onto their books, and we buy the books less because we seek an uncluttered aesthetic experience than because we want to know what their celebrated authors have been up to lately. They themselves can hardly be indifferent to this situation, and the history of modern fiction provides many instances of authors getting thoroughly confused about their aims, achievements, and deserts; one need mention only Hemingway. He remarked, in *The Sun Also Rises*, that "nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters," but he thought that as a writer he should try. He succeeded, at least if public notice is the criterion; but he was too intelligent not to understand the cost of this irrelevant triumph, musing in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech that "writing, at its best, is a



lonely life. . . . [The writer] grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates.”

A great deal of precious energy is wasted in this way, and energy has a peculiar importance, perhaps especially where American male authors are concerned. Saul Bellow thought that “the code of the athlete, of the tough boy,” was “an American inheritance . . . from the English gentleman—that curious mixture of striving, asceticism and rigor, the origins of which some trace back to Alexander the Great.” Nowadays there is evidence that some Englishmen are trying to retrieve their lost virtue, and the way they go about it is to imitate American energy. Nothing is more inventive or changes as fast as American slang, and nobody notices and imitates it more promptly than certain English writers. A whole generation of sophisticated English readers believes that nowadays the best writing in the language is American—Don DeLillo, Elmore Leonard, and, to go back a little, Saul Bellow.

MARTIN Amis, who has often announced his special devotion to Bellow, shares this passion for the latest ways of talking American. From the outset of his career he has been a Bellovian tough boy. We know, or think we know, a lot about him, and not only from his novels. He is said to have been expelled from school. He gave the hero of his first novel, published when he was twenty-four, a voice with a “habitual ironic twang, excellent for the promotion of oldster unease”—his own voice, perhaps, except that the “ironic twang” is American, or at any rate “mid-Atlantic.” *Money*, one of his best novels, is set in America, and so is this new one. Amis has recently announced his intention of emigrating, we learn from the newspapers, which regularly make a fuss about his life—the size of his advances, his passion for snooker, his failure to win the Booker Prize, the disastrous condition of his teeth, his divorce, his fractured friendships with his agent and her husband, the novelist Julian Barnes. And behind all this is the odd fact, now seen as almost too familiar to be worth mentioning, that he is the son of a celebrated novelist, from whom he has inherited an English brand of elegant misanthropy and an interest in the satirical possibil-

ities of virtuoso syntax and popular semantic variations—admittedly, Americanized to a degree that would probably not have greatly pleased Kingsley Amis.

So in reading Martin Amis it is hard indeed to forget one’s conviction (probably erroneous) that too much is already known about him; his public shadow comes between reader and book like a cataract. Reviewers who resent this intrusion (and Amis certainly has enemies) tend to ignore his virtues, which are those of intelligence and style. These would be readily perceived (in his writing, not in newspaper reports) by some ideally unclouded eye. Of course, Amis has helped in the construction of that public shadow, and if even the well-disposed reviewer cannot quite banish it from his sight of the book, the fault is partly Amis’s own.

Night Train puts a characteristically heavy initial spin on its story. It is set in a large, unnamed American city and narrated by a police officer. “I am a police,” it begins.

That may sound like an unusual statement—or an unusual construction. But it’s a parlance we have. Among ourselves, we would never say I am a policeman or I am a policewoman or I am a police officer. We would just say I am a police. I am a police. I am a police and my name is Detective Mike Hoolihan. And I am a woman, also.

This opening paragraph is very deliberate and hardworking. The odd use of “police” (whether it’s true American police parlance or is only on this occasion said to be, to create an authoritative insider voice) is justified as “a parlance”—an equally unusual usage, unknown to the heaviest version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Unlike “police,” it is not defended. “I am a police” is repeated three times, so it must be true, and then we learn that the police, though given a masculine-sounding Irish name, is in fact female. Her national origin plays no part in the story. “Police” is gender-free; it is a mark of the solidarity of the police, who need solidarity because they are, on the account here provided, everybody else’s enemy. So they even use a dialect, a parlance, that is part of their defense against the larger world. It must be said that Amis is an accomplished speaker of this dialect—or at any rate sounds as if he is, which is the important thing.

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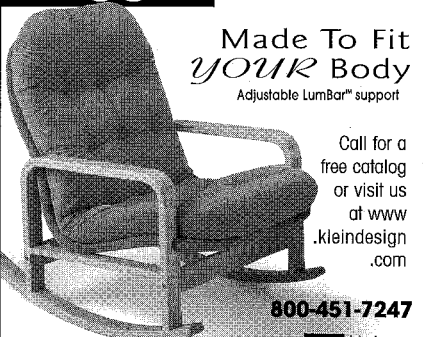
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Though an experienced homicide cop, Mike Hoolihan is charged with investigating a suicide. The victim happens to be the daughter of the police commissioner, a man to whom Hoolihan is deeply deferential (she mentions that at some point in the past he saved her life, but we hear nothing more of this, and anybody interested will have to wait for a prequel). The young woman, who seems to have been perfectly happy and sane, is found naked in a chair, having shot herself three times in the mouth ("a .22. A revolver. Not a zip. Or a faggot gun. You know like a deringer or something"). Hoolihan gets the job of informing the commissioner, who, abhorring the notion of his daughter's suicide, asks Hoolihan to conduct a quasi-private investigation with a view to showing that she was murdered. In Hoolihan's interrogation of the dead woman's lover, a very smart college professor called Trader Faulkner (the name of a real actor: there are some name games going on in the book, bait for a certain kind of Nabokov fan), she actually accuses him of the crime, with all manner of lies and bullying, but he turns out to be absolutely innocent and devoted. Once again there is a spin on the genre: this is not a murder investigation, though some would prefer it to be. This parody of the American police thriller is always saying that's not what it is. (Again, the trick is Nabokovian, which Amis, a keen admirer, would doubtless be happy to admit.)

Opportunities arise for Amis to do something he is very good at: giving expression to his horror at the thought of what men and women can do, sometimes must do, to one another. His police heroine witnesses the autopsy. "Here it comes," she says, before giving a detailed account of the procedure. "The electric saw is navigating Jennifer's cranium . . . and now you wait for the pop. . . . The cranial pop is as loud as a gunshot." She goes home to her cheap apartment, where the night train can be heard passing close. The night train is a symbol—the arrival at a dead hour of death and the fear of it, a problem Amis from time to time feels obliged to consider.

SINCE part of the pleasure of fiction is the reality it seems to represent, one can't help being impressed by all the information about the sociology of suicide, police procedure and parlance, the

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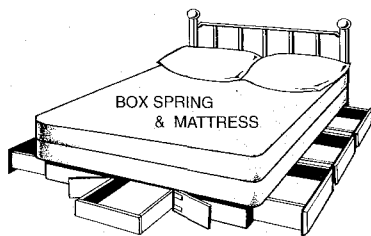
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special problem of female police officers, and so on. But now and again, as the book moves on to a denouement not very surprising but still unusual (clues aren't real clues; the dead woman's happiness didn't go very deep), the reader may feel let down in certain ways. In establishing that his narrator is a woman, Amis feels obliged to give her a conventional soft streak. This shows when she is discussing her relationships with the victim, whom she has known as a child and as a remarkable adult beauty, and with the distressed father. Here she falls out of police parlance into a sentimental linguistic void: "I watched her grow into a kind of embarrassment of perfection. Brilliant, beautiful. . . . To-die-for brilliant. Drop-dead beautiful." Of course, Hoolihan, who can use the expression "a kind of embarrassment of perfection," has to be something of a literary stylist; she is famous for her case reports. "Compared to what you guys give me to read," says a sergeant, brandishing her report before the squad, "this is fucking oratory. It's goddamn Cicero versus Robespierre." Parlance? Somebody's kidding here, surely. And there are other lapses that may be endemic to the genre of crime novel:

Crime scenes you look at like cartoon puzzles in the newspapers. Spot the difference. And something was wrong. Jennifer's body was beautiful—you wouldn't dare pray for a body like that—but something was wrong with it. It was dead.

Raymond Chandler himself had such weaker moments.

To make up for that embarrassment of imperfection there is a whole dimension to the novel that I haven't yet mentioned, and its existence is another indication of how this police novel distances itself from police novels. Jennifer was an astronomer, working, it is said, on the Milky Way's Virgo-infall velocity. Hoolihan goes off to the Institute of Physical Problems, Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, to ask Jennifer's boss what she had done there all day and whether she had seemed happy. The boss offers a lecture on such things as dark matter and Hubble's constant and the Boötes Void, "a cavity 300 million light years deep." Will the universe stop expanding and contract—the Big Bang followed 80 billion years later by the Big Crunch, followed possibly by another Big Bang, and so on,

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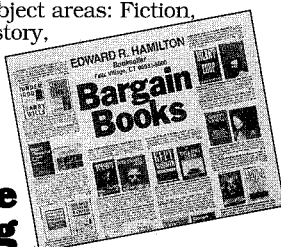
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"the eighty-billion-year heartbeat"? There are tributes to Stephen Hawking, linking his disablement to his ability to see what others missed. This, then, was the sort of thing that Jennifer thought about. It should have been energizing to be aware of standing on the edge of a paradigm shift, like Copernicus and Galileo; yet she may have seen what others missed, looking directly, like Hawking, at blackness and death. She had talked with her boss about death; was she laying a false clue, or hinting at a Pascalian terror at the eternal silence of those infinite spaces? The boss himself acknowledges that the major revolution of consciousness he predicts will not be bloodless. Drop-dead beauty will continue on occasion to drop dead, appalled by the universe.

So this is a serious novel. This police is investigating not just a suicide and not just human failure, intelligible unhappiness at the thought of the urban and ter-

restrial voids, but, ultimately, horror at the voids of a universe in which human felicity and misery are inconceivably trivial emotions, and the night train alone makes sense.

To argue that all the book's ambitions are realized would be to say far too much, but it is right to emphasize that *Night Train* is serious, because the shadow of its famous tough-boy author will probably fall across it and prevent many people from seeing it as such. That is what happened with another of Amis's shorter novels, *Time's Arrow*. And his most recent previous book, *The Information* (admittedly not among his best), was pretty well drowned out by the clamor about his teeth and his advance. His own fault, for encouraging the hype? Maybe, but that isn't really literary business. There is, on the page that we have somehow to read clearly, some authentic power, a large, pure ambition, a hunger to be serious. ☼

BRIEF REVIEWS



No Laughing Matter

by Anthony Cronin. Fromm,
272 pages, \$29.95.

Brian O'Nolan (alias Nolan, O Nual-láin, Ua Nualláin, Brother Barnabas, Flann O'Brien, Myles na Gopaleen, and so many other "pseudonymous personalities" created "in the interests of pure destruction" that his biographer gives up counting them) was born in 1911 in Strabane, Ireland. He therefore belonged to the generation of Irish writers who operated in the afterglow of the Celtic revival and under the albatrossian shadow of James Joyce. As O'Nolan, he was an able civil servant supporting a widowed mother, two jobless older brothers, nine younger siblings, and the large house in which his father had kept his Gaelic-speaking clan in comfort. As Barnabas, O'Nolan was an undergraduate prankster and literary leader. As Flann, he was

the author of the splendidly comic innovative novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*. As Myles, he wrote an amusingly testy column for the *Irish Times*, complaining of almost everything in sight. As the rest of the crowd, he wrote provocative letters to editors, which was not an unusual diversion for a Dublin literary man. Mr. Cronin is a Dublin literary man himself, and his description of the world that surrounded his cantankerous subject—of authors, critics, journalists, and people who had had a play rejected by the Abbey—has a delightful authenticity. As a young admirer of O'Nolan, he knew that set. On one occasion O'Nolan, despite his perpetual exasperation at being tagged a follower of Joyce, organized a memorial tribute to "the great exile." Friends representing the characters in *Ulysses* were to follow Bloom's daylong route in two "growlers." Mr. Cronin represented the young poet. The expedition

was launched in disorder and foundered in a pub along the way, but clearly it was a fine affair while it lasted. It was also, in an oblique way, prophetic. O’Nolan can be said to have foundered in a number of pubs, and did not live to enjoy the international esteem in which he is now held. Mr. Cronin has recorded his man with sympathy and shrewdness and has re-created his time and place so vividly that one can fairly smell the whiskey.

Borrowed Ware

translated by Dick Davis.
Mage, 203 pages, \$24.95.

Mr. Davis has put what he calls “Medieval Persian Epigrams” into easy, idiomatic English and provided an engaging introduction to the Persian world and an explanation of the code words that might otherwise puzzle modern readers. These authors were court poets, highly valued and well rewarded for wit, elegance, and a light touch. Originality of theme was not necessary, but there are surprises among the lovers’ laments and financial complaints. Jahan Khatun, one of the few women poets, considered erotic reform but decided to “renounce renunciations.” (A contemporary accused her of being a prostitute, but Mr. Davis points out that he “said this kind of thing” about everybody.) Vahshi requests,

Sweet breeze, inform my noble
lord from me
That panegyrics are what I excel at,
And if he gets obstreperous and rude,
Say satire’s also something I do
well at.

The poems are faced by versions in Persian script, making the collection pretty as well as amusing.

The House Gun

by Nadine Gordimer.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
256 pages, \$24.00.

The social or political implications of Ms. Gordimer’s novels are usually just that—implications underlying an interesting story. In this case the basic question—Does a violent society provoke violence in nonviolent individuals?—is brought to the surface and debated (at wearisome length, to be honest about it) in a murder trial. The novel’s major characters are the parents of the killer, a pros-

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100 Years of Zionism and 50 Years of Israel What Can the World Learn from It?

In 1894, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jewish journalist, was assigned to cover the Dreyfus trial in France. Seeing this Jewish officer being railroaded to a life sentence led him to the recognition that life for Jews in Europe was untenable and that the solution of the “Jewish problem” lay in the establishment of a Jewish state.

What are the facts?

The Birth of a Dream. The return to Zion had for 2,000 years been the dream of Europe’s dispersed Jews. “Next year in Jerusalem” had always been the watchword. But nothing was done to bring this dream to reality. Theodor Herzl organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel (Switzerland) in 1897 and political Zionism was born.

The concept of creating a new nation in what was then a sparsely-settled country was something never before attempted in the history of mankind. But Herzl’s vision fired up world Jewry and especially the Jews of eastern Europe, who were despairing under the yoke of Russian oppression. Energized by Zionist aspirations, British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour issued his famous Declaration in 1917, by which Palestine was established as a national home for the Jewish people. In 1922, the League of Nations entrusted Britain

with the Mandate for Palestine. Regrettably, Britain decided that the requirements for setting up a Jewish national home would not apply east of the Jordan River. That area constituted three-fourths of the territory of the Mandate. Only one-quarter of Palestine remained to fulfill the Jewish dream.

A Nation is Born and Succeeds. The modern state of Israel was founded in May 1948—fifty years after Herzl formulated the concept. Immediately the country was invaded by five Arab armies. With a total Jewish population of only about 650,000, and with limited armaments and resources, the ragtag army of Israel defeated the combined might of the aggressors and established itself firmly within its boundaries. Jordan stayed in possession of Judea/Samaria (now

known as the “West Bank”) and the eastern part of Jerusalem. Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip. The price was very high. In this bloodiest of wars imposed on Israel, over 6,000 citizen-soldiers died—over 1% of the population. In the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel once again prevailed; it repossessed Judea/Samaria, the eastern part of Jerusalem, and conquered the vast Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. And once more, in 1973, the Arabs tried to destroy Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Once more, they suffered defeat.

Despite being under constant attack and siege and having suffered over 20,000 dead in those defensive wars, Israel created social and political systems and an economy that continues to amaze experts worldwide. Israel is the only truly democratic country in the entire Middle East,

“One would think that emerging nations would wish to learn from Israel’s example. But the opposite is the case.”

with governmental structure and institutions comparable to those of the United States.

Its economy—despite the enormous defense expenditures mandated by the aggressiveness of its neighbors and despite the effort and expense of having absorbed more than 2.5 million immigrants (four times the population at the creation of the state)—can only be described as a miracle of human accomplishment. Virtually the entire infrastructure had to be built from a minimal base. Today, Israel’s economy is booming. It is a leader in high-tech technology; it has created one of the most advanced agricultural systems in the world; it is one of world leaders in economic growth rate; it has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the world; and it is the world leader in exports per capita.

We have in this century seen the demise of many “isms”, the most prominent failures being those of Communism and Nazism. But Zionism has flourished to an extent that the visionary Theodor Herzl could not have possibly imagined 100 years ago. One would think that the emerging nations would wish to learn from Israel’s example. But the opposite is the case. Goaded by the Arab nations, inalterably hostile to Israel, the United Nations has offered more than 100 resolutions condemning Israel’s actions.

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perous, quietly liberal white couple who hire an expert black lawyer to defend the son about whose life they knew almost nothing until he shot a former lover with "the house gun," which is standard domestic equipment in South Africa. Ms. Gordimer's exploration of racial and generational differences is subtle, but the position of the parents as helpless bystanders in the legal process deprives the book of much of the narrative drive that this fine author normally provides.

Visitors

by Anita Brookner.
Random House, 256 pages,
\$23.00.

Ms. Brookner's latest novel follows what has become virtually a formula for this author. A loner leading a life of boring routine is jolted out of the rut by an unexpected force. The loner in this instance is a widow whose contact with the human race has been reduced to her late husband's female cousins and their spouses. These people are all seventy or so; they have nothing to worry about but their health, and nothing to do but decide where to spend the August holidays. When an American-raised granddaughter insists that she be married in England, the poor old coots react as though the sky had fallen on them. That the American invasion does them all good comes as no surprise. A touch of salvation is part of the formula.

Baule: African Art Western Eyes

by Susan Mullin Vogel.
Yale, 312 pages, \$65.00.

Ms. Vogel is an authority on African art whose present book concentrates on the Baule of the Ivory Coast, whom she has studied for more than twenty-five years. Baule masks and sculpture have considerably influenced European artists, although the Baule themselves do not acknowledge "art." They have "things"—objects endowed with meaning and capable of exercising power. If those things happen to be beautiful, so much the better—like fine frosting on a cake. Ms. Vogel explains this African perception as well, probably, as it can be explained to a Western audience, and in doing so provides an extensive and very

interesting description of Baule society and of the people she knows and has worked with. The illustrations are magnificent and include dances, ceremonies, shrines, and scenes of everyday life, all well annotated.

Intimate Encounters

by Richard Rand.
Princeton, 220 pages,
\$65.00/\$35.00.

Mr. Rand has been assisted by Juliette M. Bianco and four contributors of essays in the creation of this survey of genre painting depicting "Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France." The paintings, with the exception of Watteau's ambiguous fantasies and Chardin's understated views of middle-class life, are brilliantly colorful scenes of flirtation, seduction, and peeping-Tommery. The critics of the time, quoted at length, complained of the "feminization" of painting. Female authors unconnected with painting complained discreetly of their limited rights. There was a lively market for prints. These matters are earnestly reported by the scholarly contributors to the overall text. There is no information from the patrons who actually bought these cheerful works instead of the sober historical and religious paintings favored by the critics. One would like to know what those cash customers thought when they made their choices.

Chihuly

essay by Donald Kuspit. Abrams,
344 pages, \$60.00.

The fantastic, sometimes alarming glass sculptures of Dale Chihuly are lavishly and beautifully photographed in this enchanting display of his work, and rewardingly discussed by Mr. Kuspit. Biographical information and location of the works are included.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

Recent books by Atlantic authors:

Making the Corps by Thomas E. Ricks. Scribner, 320 pages, \$24.00. A portion of this book appeared in somewhat different form as "The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society," in the July, 1997, *Atlantic*.



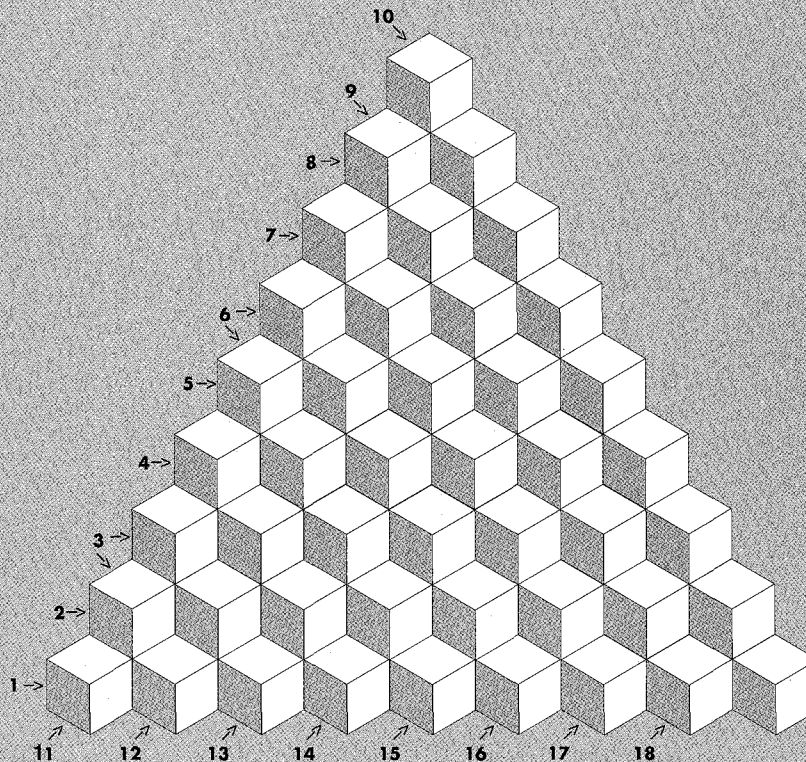
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Step by Step

In this puzzle's diagram clue answers go in three directions: Across, Up, or Down, as indicated by the arrows at the border of the grid. Entries going Across or Up will alternate between shaded and unshaded squares (the faces of the blocks); entries in the four numbered Down rows belong in adjacent unshaded squares. In any row containing more than one entry the entries are clued in their proper order and occupy the entire row. When all clue answers have been entered, solvers will need to complete the unclued row of blocks at 10 Down to form a fitting title. Answers include six proper nouns. Watch your step, now!

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 99.



Across

1. a. Too bad about grand debut of swan dive (6)
b. Prisoner is holding means of communication in card (8)
c. Teacher's stern in little French land (4)
2. a. Sit back behind a storyteller (5)
b. Supreme Court justice in favor of teaching assistants (6)
c. Most unsatisfactory deli meat taken from the tongue (5)
3. a. Computer component: I'm returning reptile with it (9)
b. Level sycamore (5)
4. a. Gripping end of spoon, attack stuffed pancake (6)
b. Bedtime summons to a tot at play (6)
5. a. Mediterranean island around All Fools' Day (5)

b. Found petition popular (5)

6. Revised Chapter I graph (3,5)
7. In Act One, rule sultanate (6)
8. Mineral found in metal cans (4)

Up

11. a. Hymns, and one more thing—donation (6)
b. Muscle builder's foremost one with knotted pecs (6)
c. Container in trunk holding two tablespoons (6)
12. a. Soldier's true essence (4)
b. Crickets' sound greeting Rod in edges of camp (5)
c. Quit ale, getting mixed drink (7)
13. a. Outerwear perfectly covering computer operator (7)
b. Match that's not so bulky (7)
14. a. Timer shortened the guy's hat (6)

b. Connect railroad with a Spanish land (6)

15. a. Oddly, Mounties must be silent (4)
b. Father is coming around to slang (6).
16. Don't tolerate papers turning yellowish (8)
17. A spring throng (6)
18. Baloney in ship spoiled (4)

Down

3. Neckwear for isle dancing (4)
6. a. Take home vase for audit (4)
b. Collect two hundred dollars in a French street (6)
9. a. Foul area in shade (5)
b. Travel in craft and talk of thieves (5)
c. Breaking a rule about one girl's name (6)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD IMPROVISATION

by J. E. Lighter

Getting Real

LAST summer the art historian Martin Bailey stirred controversy with his contention, appearing in the British publication *The Art Newspaper*, that as many as a hundred works attributed to the painter Vincent van Gogh were of questionable authenticity. *Newsweek*, in a story about this subject, reminded readers that a painting by Van Gogh, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, had sold at auction in 1990 for \$82.5 million: "That kind of money—plus the fact that van Gogh's style is not only instantly recognizable but easy to imitate—has made him a gold mine for forgers."

In truth, the lure can fall well short of "that kind of money." Whether the object is fine art, Depression glass, or signed baseballs and other celebrity memorabilia, America seems to have entered a golden age of forgeries, fakes, copycats, counterfeits, knock-offs, frauds, and spoofs. The question "Is this a *phony*—or the *real McCoy*?" was once (albeit differently phrased) the domain chiefly of philosophers, theologians, and agents of the Treasury Department. Now it must be confronted almost daily by the average newspaper reader.

No serious doubt or compelling counter-theory exists about the origin of *phony*. The word was lifted about a century ago from the lingo of con men, by whom the obsolete slang word *fawney* (handily anglicized from the Irish *fáinne*, "a finger ring") was used for an old switcheroo called the *fawney rig* (literally, "the ring trick"): crooks would palm off a gilt ring as a ring of gold at a price to match. Of course, the *fawney* was a *phony*. Early theorizing that *phony* had a mysterious link to the fabulous new telephone led to the now-standard *ph* spellings. (Nineteenth-century humorists' occasional spelling of *funny* as *phunny* probably helped.)

Holden Caulfield's famous disdain for human *phonies* in *The Catcher in the Rye*

(1951) would be directed today at what teen slang designates as *posers*. A scaled-down *poseur*, the *poser*, generally a teenager or young adult, tries unsuccessfully to score points through shallow impostures; along with a desire to identify with a given trend or clique, stylish clothes and a firm superficiality may be all that's necessary. *Posers* are by definition *bogus*, but *bogus* has widened its compass considerably since the 1830s, when it was synonymous with

Coy surged forward in the United States after the turn of the century, meaning "the genuine article," sometimes money or whiskey in particular. Ingenious theories, such as a connection with the Portuguese colony of *Macao*, have been proposed. Three theories are worth a serious look.

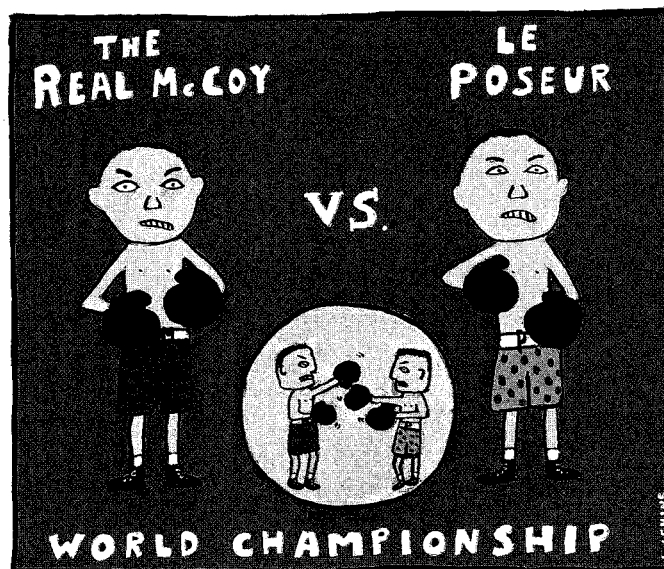
One claim is that the really "real" McCoy was the welterweight and then later the middleweight champion Norman Selby (1873–1940), whose nom de guerre, "Kid McCoy,"

played a role in the idiom's popularization. But nobody has located any legions of contrasting fake McCoy's, and the only direct connection to Selby lies in an unsubstantiated anecdote in which a skeptical drunk, after recovering from a blow from McCoy's fist, said, "It's the *real McCoy*!" One unverified assertion has it that the phrase appeared in press coverage of McCoy's big victory over Joe Choynski in 1899. Also unverified is the second theoretical claim: for the African-American inventor Elijah McCoy (1843–1929) as the "real" one. Certainly Kid McCoy was

the best-known American McCoy (or at least Selby) of his era.

Theory No. 3 takes us to Scotland, where as early as 1856 *The real McKay* referred to Scotch whisky, although why is not clear. In 1870 "*The real Mackay*" evidently became the official slogan of G. Mackay and Co.'s Edinburgh distillery. By 1883 Robert Louis Stevenson was describing himself as "*the real Mackay*." A 1911 collection of Australian slang gives the contemporary pronunciation as "Muckeye." From *McKay* to "Muckeye" to *McCoy* is practically a snap. It could have happened, anyway.

In this instance as in so many others where words are concerned, the explanation of origin falls into a sort of limbo—better than *bogus*, but not quite the *real McCoy*.



*Investigations of slang
by the editor of the
Random House Historical Dictionary
of American Slang*

"counterfeit money." Its origin is unknown, and the fact that it's also a surname only deepens the mystery. The suppleness of English syntax soon transformed the noun into an adjective—a vernacular predecessor of *phony*—and *bogus* eventually became a proper synonym for "counterfeit: false or spurious." But especially if you're under forty, *bogus* today is just as likely to mean "unpleasant or contemptible, unfair, bad," as in, "Man, this class is *bogus*!"

McCoy is a surname too, and the *real Mc-*

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